

POWER PLAY: GROTESQUE ORNAMENT AND THE ART OF POLITICAL  
PERSUASION IN EARLY MODERN FRANCE

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by

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# POWER PLAY: GROTESQUE ORNAMENT AND THE ART OF POLITICAL PERSUASION IN EARLY MODERN FRANCE

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This study aimed to survey the use of grotesque ornament in France from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and assessed its meanings in both public and private spaces. After collecting a large number of examples of grotesque images and objects, three central themes were developed to guide further research. These themes were Appropriation, wherein the motif's historical resonance was important to the development of royal and noble legitimacy, and a symbol of power; Physical Exuberance, which took into account both the materiality of the design of grotesques and their reflection of political ideals, and lastly Visual Play, which considered how artists were using grotesques, as well as their flexibility in meaning. Each successive chapter explored how these themes operated in relation to specific examples.

The Literature Review was developed in order to explore four aspects of the scholarly material currently available for the study of grotesques. First, it aimed to situate grotesques within the larger framework of new works in the field of ornament. It then began to consider how ancient works were received in sixteenth century France, and what they could offer readers about the uses and meanings of grotesque ornament. This involved a re-reading of Vitruvius, Horace, Quintilian and Lucretius, in order to understand the ancient conception of ornament (specifically grotesque ornament) for both its civic and rhetorical properties, and its reception in France. The review concluded with a synopsis of recent scholarship on grotesque imagery, largely from the field of decorative arts.

The meanings of grotesque ornament were then explored in a chapter that aimed to give a general overview of grotesque ornament in France during the early modern period, and that expanded on the themes developed for this study. Further evidence was culled from contractual language in original documents from the period, and from a consideration of how the materiality of grotesque images might alter meaning. These ideas were then investigated through three central case studies. The first case study, centered on the printmaker, Juste de Juste, who worked at the First School of Fontainebleau in the 1540s, provided the first major study of his work. The chapter considered an artist's role within the context of Fontainebleau, the network of artists

that disseminated ideas through it, and how artistic processes converged with new scientific endeavors, specifically anatomy. The case study posited that printmaking was an essentially experimental practice for many of these artists, and that for Juste de Juste, a way to express his own identity.

The second case study provided the first in-depth survey of grotesque ornament on the facades of houses in Toulouse, France. The city allowed for the examination of the civic character of the motif, as well as its relationship to forms developed at Fontainebleau. Grotesques were adapted to localized building traditions, and were made to display wealth and power in the cityscape. The next chapter on a series of grotesques painted by Simon Vouet for Anne of Austria in the 1640s similarly took up the exploration of power through ornamental display, but rather in the context of an interior space within the Palais Royal. The study found a variation in the historical appropriation of the motif, and exposed the role of female agency. It also expanded the discussion of siting royal authority in specific places, and how the dissemination of prints was important to establishing the imagery associated with that authority. These case studies were followed by an epilogue that discussed the continued use of grotesque ornament well into the eighteenth century, especially through the work of artists such as Watteau, and how the motif's flexibility allowed for its use in both Rococo and Neoclassical contexts. The epilogue alludes to the expansion of the marketplace, where the mass consumption of ornament was evident, and how this stimulated the global development of an exportable French style.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kelly D. Cook received the Bachelor of Arts degree at the State University of New York, Binghamton with a major in Art History. Her senior thesis examined the aesthetics of mid-twentieth century Land Art on the development of landscape architectural practice. From 1999 to 2002, she pursued a professional degree in Landscape Architecture at the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, New York. She received her Master of Landscape Architecture degree in 2002. The capstone project designed for this degree entailed a design for visitor access to the ruins of an ancient garden in Petra, Jordan. During this time, Kelly also participated in excavations of Roman gardens in Israel, Italy and Jordan. In the fall of 2002, Kelly matriculated at Cornell University to conduct more graduate work in garden archaeology. After surveying ancient ruins in France, Spain and Portugal, her interest in sixteenth century material was stoked when she came across documents mandating the perpetual care of Roman monuments in the south of France signed by King Charles IX. This led to a new concentration in sixteenth century French art and its reception of antique ruins. In August of 2012 she earned her doctorate from Cornell University with a dissertation that focused on the use of antique grotesque ornament in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

For Henry

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## 1 Introduction

This project has two specific aims: 1) to elucidate some of the ways in which grotesque decoration was used within the context of France from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries and 2) to suggest that this motif was one part of a foundational system of aesthetics developed in France during the centuries in question. With regard to the uses, I have focused specifically on elite consumption of grotesque imagery and have addressed the political connotations of this display. By asserting how the grotesque motif informed the foundations of artmaking, I also posit that the motif's use expanded beyond the privileged space of the court, and became a central leitmotif in the visual culture of early modern France. In order to explore this issue, I have also looked to artists' personal practices, as well as how artists share ideas. Through the dissemination of grotesque imagery, it is then possible to discern pathways for intellectual and artistic discourse both within and outside of aristocratic circles. Nonetheless, I assert that despite the license many artists took with grotesque ornament, it was resolutely a symbol of the Ancien Regime.

Setting the stage for his realist novel, *Eugénie Grandet*, published in 1833, Honoré de Balzac presents the topography of Saumur, commenting on the features of houses three hundred years old:

Des habitations trois fois séculaires y sont encore solides, quoique construites en bois, et leurs divers aspects contribuent à leur originalité qui recommande cette partie de Saumur à l'attention des antiquaires et des artistes. Il est difficile de passer devant ces maisons sans admirer les énormes madriers dont les bouts sont taillés en figures bizarres, et qui couronnent d'un bas-relief noir le rez-de-chaussée de la plupart d'entre elles. Ici, des pièces de bois transversals sont couvertes en ardoises et dessinent des lignes bleues sur les frêles murailles d'un logis terminé par un toit en colombage que les ans ont fait plier, dont les bardeaux pourris ont été tordus par l'action alternative de la pluie et du soleil. Là se

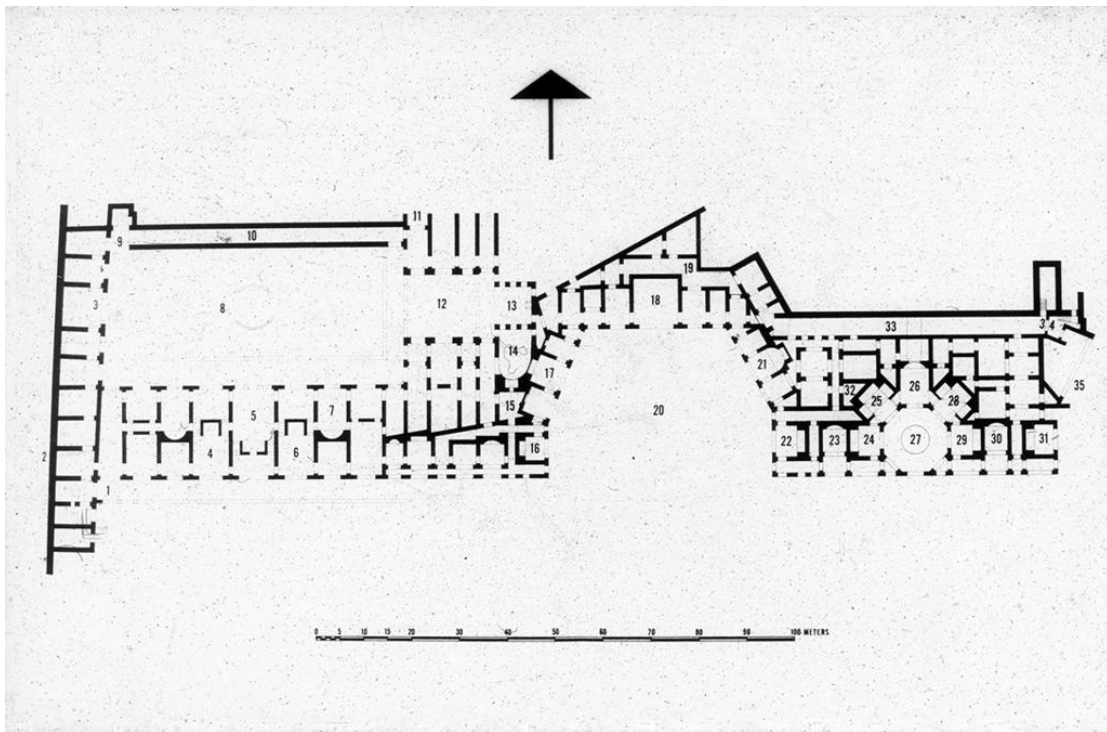
présentent des appuis de fenêtre usés, noircis, dont les délicates sculptures se voient à peine, et qui semblent trop légers pour le pot d'argile brune d'où s'élancent les oeillets ou les rosiers d'une pauvre ouvrière. Plus loin, c'est des portes garnies de clous énormes où le génie de nos ancêtres a tracé des hiéroglyphes domestiques dont le sens ne se retrouvera jamais.<sup>1</sup>

Balzac documents the faded landscape of Saumur, embellished with an architectural robustness, redolent of an age long past, when the signs and symbols of ornamentation would have been read with ease. He suggests that the knowledge to understand the “figures bizarres” and the “hiéroglyphes domestiques” has been lost to the passage of time, and it is within this milieu that he sets his tale of miserliness and social isolation. Balzac's lament was a common one in the mid-nineteenth century; the processes of industrialization and social anxiety bred a deep notion that the chivalric era of the past might have held a higher truth, a more honest way of living. These “figures bizarres” were but one symbol that connoted a lost knowledge. To Balzac and his readers they represented an illegibility, and with the exception of the antiquarians and the artists, the quotidian world of France had swept aside such visual systems through revolution, and through a willed forgetfulness. In other places in the novel, Balzac invokes other art forms, at one point suggesting that Eugenie's face is like that of a portrait by Raphael. In doing so, he creates a realist tableau, that both depicts the France of his own day, and the romantic longing that then dominated its culture for the forms of the past.

This study is focused on these “figures bizarres”. Balzac is looking at decoration generally referred to as grotesques, a term derived from their original location, in the cavernous ruins of the Domus Aurea in Rome, which at the time of its discovery in the 1480s, was thought to be a grotto. (Figures 1 and 2)

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<sup>1</sup> Balzac, Honoré de. *Eugenie Grandet*. Edited by Gilbert Quénelle. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967. p.1.



*Fig. 1 Domus Aurea, plan view*



*Fig. 2 Example of Domus Aurea frescoes*



Their immediate popularity after their discovery at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century is attested by the large number of reproductions both of the grotesques from the Domus Aurea, and the numerous manipulations of these forms that arose in Renaissance media, in painting, architecture, prints and sculpture. They also appeared across the continent, whereby local artists took these forms and adapted them to local tastes. These grotesques have been studied widely in their Italian context and recently, German grotesques that appeared in prints have been catalogued, but there have been few studies of grotesques in France even though they remained very popular throughout the early modern era.<sup>2</sup> But clearly, as we see with Balzac, at some point in the three hundred year period that separates his narration from the first appearances of grotesques in France at the turn of the sixteenth century, the meaning of grotesques had been lost. They had been relegated to the heap of mundane classical ornaments that had become so ubiquitous as to be rendered nearly invisible to the modern eye. Balzac's rigorous attention to detail, his endeavor to navigate and depict each surface echoes the features of grotesques, whereby surfaces are articulated through varying colors, textures and forms.

Sixteenth century grotesques run the gamut from sacred and ecclesiastical connotations to meanings that transgress social norms. The very flexibility of grotesques as a visual system allowed for this broad range of meanings. Typically grotesques consisted of an established

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<sup>2</sup> For Italian examples see Morel, Philippe. *Les grotesques: les figures de l'imaginaire dans la peinture italienne de la fin de la Renaissance*. Paris: Flammarion, 1997. Dacos, Nicole. *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance*. London: Warburg Institute, 1969. For German examples, see Warncke, Carsten-Peter. *Die ornamentale Grotteske in Deutschland, 1500-1650*. Berlin: V. Spiess, 1979. For the Low Countries, particularly the work of Cornelis Floris, see Hedicke, Robert. *Cornelius Floris und die Florisdekoration; Studien zur niederländischen und deutschen Kunst im XVI. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Im Verlag von Julius Bard, 1913.

formula: candelabras, trophies, putti, floral motifs, and occasionally cows' skulls or eternal flames. Piled high one on top of another, these forms were used in a variety of contexts. But this formula was embellished from the very start, with the introduction of new and complicated symbols such as metamorphosing bodies, and sexualized acts of frivolity. Moreover, grotesques could be used both as framing devices as well as central subjects. Their source in the Domus Aurea and their legacy in classical sources ensured their legitimacy, while also lending them relevance to the sixteenth century appetite for wondrous and curious objects. Renaissance antiquarians could likewise inventory their components and suggest the wide variety of their hidden meanings.

In the seventeenth century, grotesques were increasingly seen as Italian imports, and their status as such diminished their value to the visual schema of the political elite. It is repeatedly intoned that grotesques disappear from art in the seventeenth century, that the demands of neoclassicism rendered them archaic and monstrous. Nonetheless, they were still used. There was no need to abandon them entirely because they were, after all, known components of Roman decoration. While intensified readings of Vitruvius may have revealed their "monstrous" character to seventeenth century Purists, they were still a verified source of classical meaning. Grotesques in fact represented yet another classical system which could be purified and recodified by successive Bourbon regimes. And with a little fine-tuning, grotesques could be redrawn and rescaled to depict the nuances and proportions of French baroque tastes. They were made to conform to a Counter-Reformation aesthetic whereby their effusive properties were reigned in, and their pictorial abundance was trimmed down. Any hint of controversy was erased

from their production, and they were made to serve the decorative dictates of the Bourbon monarchs.

After the long seventeenth century in which grotesques were trained and disciplined, during the early eighteenth century, there was clearly an effort to reassess grotesques' potential for pictorial meaning. The severity of the previous century gave way to a lightness concurrent with new tastes for the Regency's Rococo flourishes, and for the disquieting follies of Watteau's *fête galante*. That Watteau himself created grotesques is no coincidence, and this work precipitated a renewed interest in the forms. By the time that the Bay of Naples began to yield its rich archaeological findings, grotesques had already reemerged and were re-imagined for the eighteenth century. These archaeological discoveries once again set up a process whereby the historical and aesthetic clarity of the forms was reexamined. Common to all of these epochs, grotesques have carried very specific meanings that have been excavated, examined, parsed, dissected, and reconstituted all over again. Each time grotesques have surged to prominence their meanings have been recalibrated, but they are always conceived as classically referent, pictorially robust, and resonant of elite ideology.

This study is an attempt to understand how the small system of grotesque imagery was absorbed and reconstituted in the art of early modern France. Through the uses of grotesques, we may in turn see the refraction of changing aesthetics, philosophies, and politics. Despite decades of religious civil war, France nonetheless maintained a relative geographical and political integrity by virtue of its centralized monarchy. Moreover, the makers of French culture were central and focused on producing a cohesive visual rhetoric to support the aims of the monarchy. This centralization certainly increased in the seventeenth century, but we may see its early

manifestations as early as the reigns of Louis XII and François I. Through the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries there was also the transference of grotesque work from an elite circle, to the realm of the bourgeoisie. The traffic in such images always had a high-low tide, but the steady emergence of the middle class is concurrent with the adoption of grotesque imagery in more popular arts and into middle class homes. The houses that Balzac sees in Saumur are the houses of the bourgeoisie, where “ Tantôt un protestant y a signé sa foi, tantôt un ligueur y a maudit Henri IV. Quelque bourgeois y a gravé les insignes de sa *noblesse de cloches*, la gloire de son échevinage oublié.”<sup>3</sup> He rightly intuits that the sociological consequences of the diffusion of such imagery are indicative of the larger sphere of social aspiration and expression. He concludes “L’Histoire de France est là tout entière.”<sup>4</sup> The study of grotesque ornament in France has the potential to reveal far more than artistic tastes. By examining the motif in its historical context, greater swathes of social structure can be revealed.

In this study, both “the grotesque” and “grotesques” will be used almost interchangeably, both in reference to the classical or ornamental designs designated by the term. The use of the terms will not connote alternative meanings such as subterranean, subversive, or antithetical. These attributes and more may be explored in the context of specific examples, but these characteristics will be clearly defined in relation to the “normative” classical grotesque designated by the study. Additionally the terms “Renaissance” and “Early Modern” will be used to refer to sixteenth and seventeenth century art respectively. “Renaissance” is more apt to highlight the courtly character of the reigns of the last Valois, who had been in power since the Hundred Years War, and while François’s reign is marked by aspects that we might be tempted

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<sup>3</sup> Balzac, 1. The italics are the work of Gilbert Quénelle.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

to call “modern”. It was for all intents and purposes deeply rooted in much older traditions. The rise of the Bourbon dynasty however suggests a break with the humanist tradition of the sixteenth century. Modes of behavior were redefined at court and new aesthetic criteria were promulgated. Many of its features can be described as early or proto modern, and so these terms shall apply here.

## 1.2 The Formal Aspects of Grotesques

Historically, there has been a variance between the meanings of “the grotesque” and “grotesques”. The former refers to a genre, a category of art and literature that has been studied extensively during the twentieth century by various scholars including Wolfgang Kayser, Mikhail Bakhtin, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Ewa Kuryluk, and Frances Barasch.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies have appeared that seek to define the grotesque and to assert a new cadre of works under its auspices, and many of these publications have found themselves indebted to the above-mentioned authors.<sup>6</sup> Appearing largely during the 1960s, and inspired perhaps by Bakhtin, much

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<sup>5</sup> Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963. Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge, Mass: M. I. T. Press, 1968. Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982. Kuryluk, Ewa. *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1987. Barasch, Frances K. *The Grotesque; A Study in Meanings*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of these include Rosen, Elisheva. “Innovation and Its Reception: The Grotesque in Aesthetic Thought” *SubStance*, Vol. 19, No. 2/3, Issue 62/63: Special Issue: Thought and Innovation (1990), pp. 125-135. Howard, Seymour. “Eros, Empathy, Expectation, Ascription, and Breasts of Michelangelo (A Prolegomenon on Polymorphism and Creativity)” *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 22, No. 44 (2001), pp. 79-118. Maiorino, Giancarlo. *The Portrait of Eccentricity: Arcimboldo and the Mannerist Grotesque*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University

of this scholarship aimed to assess the qualities of active resistance and alterity of the grotesque. Generally conceived in large narrative arcs, these histories, much like the renewed parallel interest in Mannerism, aimed to suggest how such movements worked against prevailing dominant paradigms. What has resulted however is a cacophony of competing claims about the grotesque that have obfuscated the earliest traces of that other, classical grotesque that we find in Renaissance Italy. “Grotesques”, as it is used here, refers to this neglected train of images, the specific instances of artistic production, from the images of the Domus Aurea, certain motifs in literature, and other figural representations that maintain both a familiarity and distance to the broader meanings of the genre. This study however is not about the genre, so much as it is about specific manifestations of grotesque imagery. Again, grotesque images consist of certain key images inherited from the paintings of the Domus Aurea, including putti, garlands, candleabra, eagles, Janus heads and romping figures. While there are many deviations from these conventions, ultimately most grotesque forms can be traced back to the antique source. Additionally, grotesques reference specific places. As a number of scholars and artists originally considered the Domus Aurea simply a cavern or grotto, the original conception of grotesques corresponds to the physical designation of the grotto.

There are a number of variations in grotesque imagery that arise in the sixteenth century. These examples are amalgamations of imagery beyond the Domus Aurea itself, often taking influences from other examples of antique statuary and ornament, as well as Gothic

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Press, 1991. Connelly, Frances S. (ed.) *Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

predecessors. Artists produced a number of sketches recording the remains of the Domus Aurea (Fig. 3), and while these were crucial in the spread of the motif, it was really Raphael's projects at the Vatican, along with Giovanne da Udine, that Renaissance culture developed a unique grotesque motif particular to the era and not wholly dependent on antique precedent (Fig. 4).<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 3 Workshop of Raphael, *The Loggetta of Cardinal Bibbiena, Vatican, 1516-19*

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<sup>7</sup> Nicole Dacos has collected a number of these early sketches in her *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance*. London: Warburg Institute, 1969. For Raphael's work at the Vatican see her *The Loggia of Raphael: a Vatican art treasure*. New York: Abbeville Press, 2008.



*Fig. 4 Detail of Vatican Loggetta, 1516-1517, fresco*



Artists quickly took up the basic ingredients of grotesque imagery and forged them into ever more complex compositions. The most typical elements include vegetal scrollwork, putti, trophies, satyrs and metamorphosing figures piled high one on top of another. Later additions include caryatid and atlantid figures, cartouches, inscriptions, and distinct specimens of plants and animals, ribbons, temples and sometimes war booty. Compositionally they moved quite rapidly beyond a single vertical orientation, and would expand horizontally into stage-like spaces with the suggestion of depth and weight.

Giovanni Pietro da Birago is usually credited as the author of a set of twelve engraved grotesques that were extremely popular in France.<sup>8</sup> They were adopted into the decorative schemes at Gaillon, and were used in the doorjambs of Chartres Cathedral. Each of the twelve examples presents a strictly vertical assemblage of densely oriented scrolling leaves weaving together trophies and putti. (Fig. 5) Putti and discarded arms are strewn throughout and each of the engravings has a mythological ensemble situated at the bottom in order to give a sense of weight and terminus to the whole. Here the figures on the bottom consist of a putto carrying a lit torch, and riding on the back of a triton. Urns within the image represent distinctive decorative objects, and the artist has manipulated the scalar relationships between the pieces to both highlight the surface details of these objects, and to give the effect of shallow relief in some places.

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<sup>8</sup> Zoan Andrea is the engraver of at least three of these images. See Byrne, Janet S. *Renaissance Ornament Prints and Drawings*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981. p. 72-75.



*Fig. 5 Pietro da Birago, Triton Ridden by a Child, ornamental panel, 1505-1515, engraving, 53.4cm x 7.8 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art*

He has also emphasized three-dimensionality in other parts, for instance at the bottom of the composition. It is as if the artist is attempting to reference a number of different kinds of ruin:

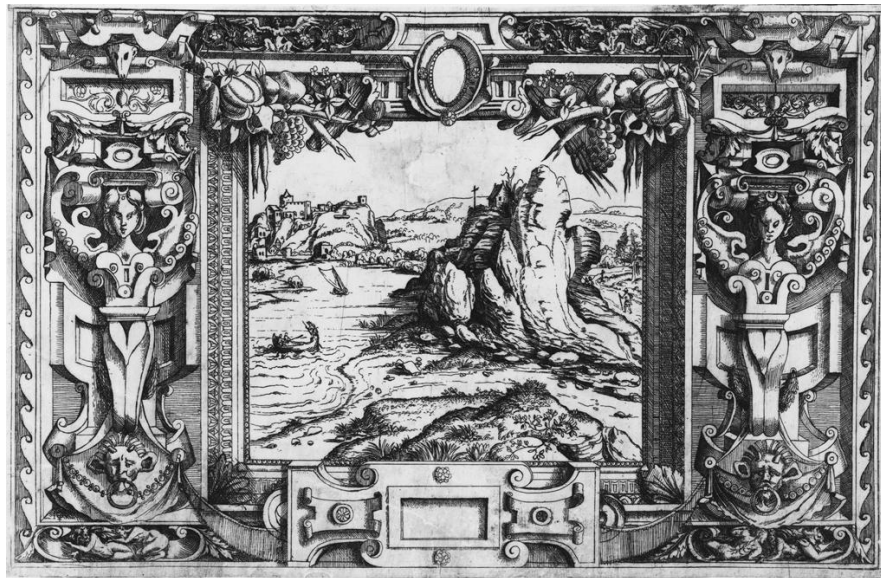
relief sculpture, funerary urns, mythological sculpture groups, all in one setting. In other examples from the collection of twelve, inscriptions are included, as well as empty cartouches waiting to be filled. Though the vegetal supports clearly defy any sense of real structure, these densely packed compositions nonetheless have the overall effect of architectural pilasters. The density of the configuration conveys a sense of solidity and weight. True architectural members, such as a grotesque pilaster in the Beaux Arts in Lyon (Fig. 6), demonstrate the complementarity between the printed grotesque from Birago, and decoration used in Renaissance chateaux. However, as is evident from the Lyon example, constructed pilasters often did not have the same profusion of details found in prints. This is perhaps a measure of the technical aspects of stonecarving. The Lyon pilaster displays the monumentality that a stonemason could achieve with this motif. Both are examples of the candelabrum type of grotesque that remained close to ancient prototypes in which elements are oriented vertically and often included tendrils, trophies and flames.



*Fig. 6 Grotesque pilaster, Musee des Beaux-arts de Lyon, limestone*

Mid-century grotesques demonstrate a different sensibility. A landscape print from Fontainebleau (Fig. 7) serves as an example of the new solidity of figures and invention with which artists were pursuing the grotesque motif. Though strapwork had been used in jewelry designs before, it became an important new element in Fontainebleau decoration, and the thickly curling element here makes an appearance. The leafy tendrils have been replaced by full fruits, particularly gourds and berries that hang in pendants or are carried by human figures. Oriented horizontally, the composition responds to the abundant use of stucco and fresco-work being

produced at Fontainebleau. A central cartouche is used to portray a rolling landscape, and it is bounded by caryatid figures that seem unsettled in shallow niches. Again, the scale of bodies distorts perception, with putti here seeming too large in relation to the adult figures in the upper corners. There is a feeling of ripeness, perhaps of fertility that intimates that to look into the cartouche is simultaneously piercing the physical frame. Doing so produces a frisson, as each element is clearly articulated and begs the eye to look over every part of the image. This picture has a density that is very different from the previous candelabrum grotesque; the heavy articulation of the components keeps the composition from sinking into a neutralized whole.



*Fig. 7 Example of Fontainebleau grotesque, Master I{X}IV, Cartouche with a View of a Rocky Landscape, 242 x 382 mm, The Illustrated Bartsch. Vol. 33, Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century: School of Fontainebleau*

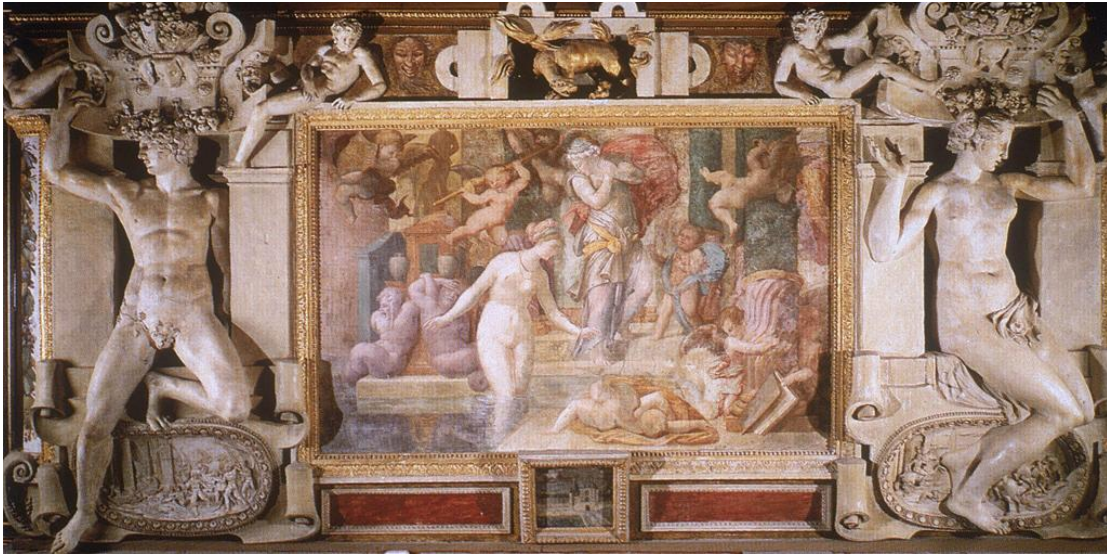
This effect would have been even more emphatic in the Galerie François Ier. In this setting, each of these elements would have been rendered in high stucco relief and would have been used in the midst of an orchestrated programme of paint, stucco, tesserae, and gilding that

would have given even greater autonomy to each depicted object or body. (Fig. 8 and 9) Both the print and the stucco work in the gallery are grotesques in that they share certain motifs that were certainly part of the ancient vocabulary: putti, vegetal pieces, contorted or metamorphosing figures, cartouches, distortions of scale, and precarious structure. But at Fontainebleau artists began to experiment with this toolkit and added a greater sense of physicality and three-dimensionality than had been found in the candelabrum examples.



*Fig. 8 Galerie François Ier, Fontainebleau, 1534-9*





*Fig. 9 Rosso Fiorentino, section from the Galerie François Ier, Fontainebleau, 1534-9*

Artists attempted to make the grotesque ornament as vital as the images depicted in the cartouches. They also used the human figure as a source of stylization, giving it greater length and attempting to create an elongated, graceful line that mimics the sweeping tendrils of earlier grotesque prototypes. So rather than the fleshy glimpses of leaves, the emphasis is on the representation of human flesh. This flesh is in turn bounded in strapwork or twisted into architectural elements. Rather than focusing on ancient precepts for proportions, Fontainebleau artists used the human body as a play-thing.

These elements remain consistent throughout two and a half centuries of artistic production in France. Though proportions of the body might change, or the sexual undertones diminished, the motif itself remained intact. I will delve further into how grotesques developed during the time concerned in this study and I will further explain why they changed. Patronage demands and new tastes necessitated a shifting cadre of elements but the basic pieces persisted.

## 2 Literature Review: *To ‘amend this madness, and the roving fashions of the fresco painters!’*

This project aims to understand the uses of the grotesque aesthetic --- how it shaped and informed viewer experience, how it reflected the aspirations of its makers and patrons, and why grotesques imagined in the late fifteenth century became the “basis of European surface ornament until the nineteenth century.”<sup>9</sup> The literature on grotesques is extensive, however this chapter will focus on four particular aspects of this corpus: theories of ornament, ancient literary remains, their reception in sixteenth and seventeenth century French culture, and modern scholarship on the formal aspects and contexts of grotesques. Because the geographical area of Europe is perhaps too large for the study of such phenomena in a format such as a dissertation, this study looks specifically at the case of France from 1500 to the end of the Régence, in approximately 1723. It will go on a little further to speculate as to the continued use of the grotesque motif after the Revolution of 1789. Nonetheless the study is limited in geographic and temporal scope largely demanded by the sheer volume of examples and evidence in the visual record. The physical evidence of grotesques is still uniquely intact in many places in the country, thanks especially to the efforts of French scholars at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, this project aims to move beyond the mere impulse to ornament, as understood in the form of the grotesque, and to push further, to explore how

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<sup>9</sup> Snodin, Michael, and Maurice Howard. *Ornament: A Social History Since 1450*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. p. 33

<sup>10</sup> Of particular interest amongst many other examples, see Destailleur, Hippolyte. *Notices sur quelques artistes français architectes, dessinateurs, graveurs du 16e au 18e siècle*. 1863. And Duban, Jacques Félix. *Chateau de Blois; décorations, murales peintes tentures, fresques, plafonds, carrelages d’après la*. Paris: Librairie Générale de l’architecture et des Travaux Publics, Ducher et cie, n.d.



ornament acts to structure viewing, as well as to alter it. Many past studies have approached grotesques from a formalistic and connoisseurial perspective.<sup>11</sup> While any of these works are invaluable for what they offer in the sheer volume of information, this study will be limited to those works that consider French grotesques in some depth, or that raise larger contextual questions of the material. France provides a unique opportunity to study this the development of a visual culture by virtue of its centralized government, led by kings who increasingly embraced the power of art to shape attitudes and environments. But this exploration will also move beyond the confines of a discourse on power and will attempt to illuminate not only the ways that grotesque ornament traverses media and surfaces, but to expose the networks of very active agents in its dissemination. In essence, it is not just the kings of France that benefit from the elucidation of the grotesque aesthetic, but painters, humanists, nobles, and various other agents of social change.

The methods of this study are comprised of investigation of first hand accounts of French grotesques, some contracts in which grotesques are mentioned, other primary sources that shed light on aspects of early modern French culture, and secondary sources that reveal the underlying mechanisms of art production in France during the two centuries concerned. Great emphasis is also placed on first hand observation of grotesques made on research trips to France, as well as various trips to collections that hold valuable objects and images.

The ancient sources that were being consumed by erudite members of society also play an important role in shading the cultural appreciation of certain types of design. Lastly, an effort

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<sup>11</sup> There is quite a vast literature on grotesques as decorative motif that consider the genealogy of this design. See D. Guilmard, *Les Maîtres ornemanistes* (Paris, 1880), P. Jessen, *Der Ornamentstich* (Berlin, 1920) and his *Meister des Ornamentstich* (Berlin, 1923.) J. Baltrusaitis, *Reveils et prodiges* (Paris, 1960); C. Ossola, *Autunno del Rinascimento* (Florence, 1971).

has been made to understand and demonstrate the unique role that the materiality of grotesque ornament plays in both its manufacture as well as its reception. The dissertation will present an overview of the sources used, followed by a chapter in which dominant themes are explored for the meaning of the grotesque. I believe that there are still many themes to be suggested by these curious designs, but for now three themes will provide a window onto elite consumption during the period outlined above: Assimilation/Imitation, the Physicality/Materiality of Grotesques, and their Mutability/Visual Play. Three case studies will then be presented in which aspects of the meanings of grotesque ornament along with considerations of material matters will be synthesized to further explore how this ornament was used beyond the obvious decorative sense.

There are also certain omissions that I would like to point out that I hope to come back to in the future, particularly for a longer manuscript to be published. I do not investigate, for instance, the Galerie François Ier, as much work has already been done on this topic and it is by far too rich a subject to adequately explore here. This study also greatly neglects the years of Louis XIV's reign, which again is immensely important, but I believe a whole study could be done on Félibien, Le Brun, and the changing notion of ornament. Examples also weave in and out of the capital, but never really rest for long in Paris. The activities of an often itinerant court as a center of cultural production, and its relation to peripheral communities was too enticing, so the city of Paris, again, might warrant its own specific study. However, many of the Renaissance and early modern ornaments of that city are no longer extant, and it would possibly prove more an archival investigation than anything else.

## 2.1 The foundational terms of ornament

When it comes to the relevance of ornament, we must question the innate meanings of such images. In fact, ornament can blur the boundaries between image and object. But this project argues that by their very ubiquity, grotesques in France, as elsewhere, connote very specific meanings as “representations of the social sphere” to borrow Roger Chartier’s phrase.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, this work suggests that grotesques act in the same ways that Ernst Cassirer has defined for allegory, as they may become the “vehicle of thought” themselves.<sup>13</sup> And by their very flexibility and mutability, grotesques may mean different things in different contexts. French grotesques of this period challenge the very category denoted as ornament, and they moreover challenge its innately two-dimensional quality. Grotesques in France move well into three dimensions.

Much work has been done on ornament in non-Industrial and non-Western societies.<sup>14</sup> Citing Plato’s definition of demons, Oleg Grabar has suggested that ornament acts as a mediating force, whereby it

is itself or exhibits most forcefully an intermediate order between viewers and users of art, perhaps even creators of art, and works of art. This intermediate spirit takes many forms, but all of them are characterized by one central feature: while necessary to the comprehension of works of art, they are not, except in a few extreme cases, the work of art itself.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Chartier, Roger. *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988. p 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cassirer, Ernst. *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Translated by Mario Domandi. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1963, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> The most important and one of the earliest to focus solely on ornament and its cultural role was Riegl, Alois. *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen Zu Einer Geschichte Der Ornamentik*. Berlin: G. Siemens, 1893. The English version, recently re-released was consulted for my project - Riegl, Alois, and David Castriota. *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992. More recent, and valuable studies include: Powers, Martin J. *Pattern and Person: Ornament, Society, and Self in Classical China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006. Necipoglu, Gülru, and Mohammad Al-Asad. *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture : Topkapı Palace Museum Library Ms H. 1956*. Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Grabar, Oleg. *The Mediation of Ornament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. p. 45.

This provides a framework by which one can gauge a number of questions: what is it exactly that is the intermediary: a message, a meaning, a metaphor? How do people act as agents within this system? And why does art need an intermediary in the first place? Grabar's idea posits something akin to a method or tool of understanding, that ornament cannot simply have relevant meaning on its own, but is contingent on some other forms, i.e. what is framed, or a central narrative that is not obviously present. In the case of grotesques, what is being mediated is an understanding of both ancient and medieval imagery, and as François Quiviger has suggested, the realm of sensory perception.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, it is the contention of this dissertation, that ornament, at least in the case of grotesques in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in France, can be *the* work of art.

Grabar's thesis suggests though acting as an intermediary, ornament nonetheless is communicating something that is perhaps processual. For Grabar, this is intimated in the transformation of the object in the intervention of an ornamented surface. He asks of the creators of objects, "Could it be that what they meant is not what we see, at least not entirely? That the transformation of the mimetic sign is important, not the sign itself?"<sup>17</sup> This position moves ornament away from the status of *parergon*, and for this study, closer to the great discourses of Renaissance art. Rather, for the sixteenth century, this corresponds with the role that ornament played in the *paragone*, that ongoing debate over the supremacy of certain media, and certainly the Galerie of François Ier is a good example, with its alternating roles for stucco, paint, and tesserae, blurring the boundaries of two and three-dimensional representation. But it also could

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<sup>16</sup> Quiviger, François. *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art*. London: Reaktion Books, 2010. p. 70-87.

<sup>17</sup> Grabar, 19.

be explored for its relation to the development of the spectacle in courtly culture, whereby a barrage of ornaments led to sensorial understanding of the mechanisms of power. In fact, could we not go so far as to say that the advent of new ornamental systems in the sixteenth century never aimed for narrative, but rather for the sense experience, a nascent phenomenological reading of images and environments?

Grabar was responding to his own research in Islamic art, for which substantive aspects of images are comprised of ornament. But for the Western European model, many scholars have chosen to forgo questions of ornament, or have relegated it to a lesser category of ‘decorative art’. Substantial work in the past few decades has sought to redress this predicament, giving greater attention and rigor to the field of decorative art studies. Ornament in particular has benefited from the attention, especially since the publication of Ernst Gombrich’s *The Sense of Order* in 1979, a text that Grabar repeatedly mentions. Gombrich’s contention was that through the study of ornament, broad arcs of social and formal elements could be revealed through many periods of Western art history. In particular, he was curious to trace the moral aspects of ornament’s use, and found a prevailing trend in societies that suggested it was often seen as a vehicle for temptation, through its seduction of the senses. He summarizes critiques of ornament by writing that it is “dangerous precisely because it dazzles us and tempts the mind to submit without proper reflection.”<sup>18</sup> He finds that such positions ultimately derive from ancient textual sources not generally about art per se, but rather about literature, where ornament is an important aspect of rhetorical arts of persuasion but also of decorum. He identifies what he calls an “aesthetic ideal of restraint” particular to the Western tradition that also served as a medium to

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<sup>18</sup> Gombrich, E. H. *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979. p. 17.

differentiate what was virtuous or beautiful from what was not, or what was ‘other’. For Gombrich, there are essentially two modes of perception in relation to ornament, the ‘sense of order’ and the ‘search for meaning’ and it is through grotesque ornament that he sees these two aspects in closest contact.<sup>19</sup>

Many scholars of grotesques, such as Morel and Chastel, have placed it as a motif squarely within the discourse of Neoplatonic theories of art.<sup>20</sup> And it is easy to see that the understanding of the obfuscated meanings and perplexing imagery of grotesques would lend itself to such readings. Knotted within the discussion of grotesques and their seductive, controversial subtext is rooted the larger specter of license, creativity and the autonomy of art that is central to formal elements of Neoplatonic works, and furthermore to ancient texts that deal with the authority of art. In the ancient world, at the same time that ornament’s function was described in a number of texts, parallel discussions of art and its origins emerged. Art was often used as a leitmotif of rhetoric’s pedagogy. It had a mechanical function in rhetoric: to embellish one’s speech in order to persuade or convince. Ornament also treaded the line between real and unreal and posed challenges to the rhetorician, for using ornament that was not grounded in ‘reality’ could posit fantasy or dangerous unrealities, ultimately sabotaging one’s position. In short, the ‘restraint’ that Gombrich identifies is incumbent in ancient discourses of ornament.

Erwin Panofsky traced this debate in his work, *Idea: A Concept in Art History*, which navigated the Platonic and Post-Platonic notions of ideals and nature/reality in Western

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 256.

<sup>20</sup> See discussion of their work in “Contemporary Scholarship” in this chapter.

philosophy.<sup>21</sup> He asserts that for Plato, “either the artist produces copies...in which case his *μιμησις εικαστική* (copying exactly) reproduces the components of sense – perceptible reality – but absolutely nothing more” which leads the artist to reproduce nothing but the world of Ideas.<sup>22</sup> However, the artist that does otherwise “begets unreliable and deceptive illusions” a theme recurrent in condemnation of grotesque imagery.<sup>23</sup> Panofsky notes that even during antiquity, the Platonic view was widely argued against, but it remained a palpable force nonetheless. The arena for art began to open a little wider, and concepts of beauty emerged that eclipsed the stale confines elucidated by Plato.<sup>24</sup>

Panofsky contends that this opening occurred as early as the Hellenistic era, when there was not only a reconsideration of art and creativity, but also an expansion in the concepts of art criticism and connoisseurship.<sup>25</sup> He reckons that a greater recognition for the “internal values of art” was taking place, positing “the autonomy of art in relation to deceptive and imperfect reality.”<sup>26</sup> Artists increasingly came to be viewed not simply as copyists of nature, but as rivals to it, striving to perfect its deficiencies. Panofsky emphasizes that during the Renaissance, the same idea of the artist’s ability to “correct” nature was evident even in the writings of Alberti.<sup>27</sup> The recurring evocation of the Zeuxis legend in which the artist Zeuxis combined the most beautiful

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<sup>21</sup> Originally published Panofsky, Erwin. *Idea, ein beitrag zur begriffsgeschichte der älteren kunsttheorie*. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1924. I will be using the English edition published by the University of South Carolina Press in 1968.

<sup>22</sup> Panofsky, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance his discussion of Cicero, p. 12-13, writing, “Here the artist is neither an imitator of common and descriptive appearances, nor is he a pathfinder for a metaphysical *οὐσία* (substance) who is bound to rigid norms and whose exertions are yet doomed to ultimate failure. Instead, in his mind dwells a glorious prototype of beauty upon which he, as a creator may cast his eye.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 14. Panofsky quotes Philostratus for instance, who wrote “He who does not love painting, does an injustice to truth and does an injustice to wisdom” a sentiment that Panofsky sees echoed later in the writings of Leonardo da Vinci.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 48-49.

attributes of the Crotonian maidens into a single painted image presenting the paradigm of beauty, posited a counterpoint to the strict terms of Platonic mimesis. It invited reflection on the combinatory practices of artists, and allowed for the free play found in grotesque ornament where elements are not rendered for their similarity to nature, but rather a metamorphosing fantasy.

Panofsky does point out that Alberti is far from the Neoplatonic notion in which beauty is expressed through its relation to the *idea* of beauty, and which resonates with “its formula preserved within us.”<sup>28</sup> Alberti’s strict adherence to nature as the model for the artist delimited artistic skill to the ability to copy well, and only afterwards embellishing an image with further refinements. Culling Cicero and Philostratus, he aims to “warn this artistic genius against overvaluing itself and to call it back to the contemplation of nature.”<sup>29</sup>

Ornament indeed finds itself in an intermediate zone here. For grotesque ornament there is a relationship to natural observation that has medieval antecedents. Within the margins of medieval manuscripts one finds the results of artists’ direct observations from nature.<sup>30</sup> Manuscripts continued to be produced well into the sixteenth century in France, and elsewhere, the work of Guilio Clovio attests to the format’s enduring popularity. Grotesques could act as a site for the cataloguing of nature and its marvels.

However, Panofsky posits that ‘phantasy’ represents another category entirely in regard to Alberti’s thought,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 58. The discussion of the artist’s relation to nature and artistic license is one most recently and convincingly taken up by Alina Payne in *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. See also Summers, David. *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

<sup>30</sup> See Baltrusaitis, Jurgis. *Réveils et prodiges: le gothique fantastique*. Paris: A. Colin, 1960.



Alberti believed that the mental ability to perceive beauty could be attained only by experience and practice. And in fact, even though Cennini and after him Leonardo granted the artist the ability to emancipate himself from reality by varying and inventing, no Renaissance thinker would have dared to consider beauty the child of ‘phantasy’ as Dion and Cicero had done.<sup>31</sup>

This is perhaps a distinctly Italian, and fifteenth century phenomenon however, as it was observed through the lens of the early twentieth century. Subsequent art historical scholarship has provided further evidence of a plurality of ideals with regard to the questions of nature, representation, and artistic practice.

Recent scholars such as Ethan Matt Kavaler and Anne Marie Sankovitch have begun to historicize ornament, as well as the scholarship on the topic. Sankovitch has explored the four centuries’ worth of investigation into the church of St. Eustache in Paris, a building constructed in the early sixteenth century and comprised of both Gothic and Renaissance elements.<sup>32</sup> She traces the uses of these terms, and explores the problems of defining such a building by its hybridity. The vast majority of her sources describe the structure of St. Eustache as the Renaissance part, and the Gothic aspect clothed in its ornament. In looking at this relationship, Sankovitch develops a notion of the historiography of Gothic that often limits it to the superficial effects of extravagant ornamentation. Her sources, such as Alberti, consistently reinforce this viewpoint, and while she does not go so far as to suggest an alternative, she does provide in the subtext of her study, the idea that local, French architects of the period would not have seen these aspects in the strict dichotimization that historians have foisted on the site. Citing Guillaume de

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<sup>31</sup> Panofsky, 58-59.

<sup>32</sup> Sankovitch, Anne-Marie. “Structure/Ornament and the Modern Figuration of Architecture”. *Art Bulletin*. 80, no. 4 (1998): 687-717.

Breul for instance, Sankovitch writes that contemporary viewers saw an integrative whole, based more on the power to evoke, than to be deconstructed,

Instead they saw (and esteemed) a monument notable for the abundance of its spatial and material traits: the great quantity and variety of its sculptural decoration, the great number of its piers and chapels, the great height of its vaults, and the unquantifiable spaciousness and richness of the building as a whole.<sup>33</sup>

How this pertains to this study is to highlight the much more fluid nature of the conversation between objects and ornament in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as opposed to the categorization of the last two centuries of scholarship. Ornament, in short, was meant to operate as fully within the visual field as the structure or object on which it resided, and I would go even further, to say that it often informed structure by its design. Sankovitch's work moreover, posits a collapsing of the line between Gothic and Renaissance that was key to works produced especially in France.

Ethan Matt Kavalier has explored this idea to an even greater degree, in his study of Gothic ornament during the Renaissance in the Low Countries.<sup>34</sup> Like Sankovitch, he sees the beguiling, awesome aspects of ornament to be the prime motivator in their inclusion in Renaissance contexts. In France, as in the Low Countries, Gothic and Antique ornament often occur within the same spaces, or on the same objects. Citing Grabar's work amongst others, Kavalier describes the powerful role of Gothic ornament as an "effective agent of self-

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 689.

<sup>34</sup> See his chapter "Gothic as renaissance : ornament, excess, and identity, circa 1500" in Elkins, James, and Robert Williams. *Renaissance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2008. p. 115-157. Also Kavalier, Ethan Matt. "Renaissance Gothic: Pictures of Geometry and Narratives of Ornament." *Art History*. 29.1 (2006): 1-46.

representation and cultural change”<sup>35</sup> and proceeds to discuss case-studies in which architects used the space of a Gothic church for instance, to inscribe their signatures into Gothic ornament, or the preference for Late Gothic ornament when a need for grandiose political display was called for.<sup>36</sup> What is essential in Kavalier’s work is the notion that ornament was a powerful means of artistic exchange, through its construction, its capacities for self-expression, and for expressing the agenda of the state, and through its ability to be disseminated in the books of the nascent printing industry.

Though Panofsky’s text never elucidates the specific role of ornament relative to the Neoplatonic concept of the Idea, ornament is nonetheless present in his discussion of phantasia and artistic license. The playfulness, the flexibility, and the personal referents that Kavalier recognizes ornament can provide, are attested by the use of grotesque ornament in France in the Renaissance. Panofsky also picks out the cultural phenomenon of greater artistic connoisseurship and criticism that occurs in the Hellenistic world, a time of ever increasing flexibility for ancient artistic practices. This moment in history is a point at which the cosmopolitanism of Alexander’s late Empire benefitted from increasing contacts with other parts of the world, areas of concentrated wealth, and a growing sophistication in the arts and literature. It would be a worthwhile study to consider how the monarchs of Renaissance France appreciated this distinct period, and attempted to emulate it through their own artistic patronage. Such an appropriation would represent a distinct colonization of ancient history in Renaissance Europe.

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<sup>35</sup> See Kavalier in Elkins, et al. p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> See pages 126-128 in the Elkins volume for Kavalier’s discussion of identity. For political display, see Kavalier, “Margaret of Austria, ornament, and the court style of Brou” in Campbell, Stephen J, and Evelyn S. Welch. *Artists at Court: Image-making and Identity, 1300-1550*. Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2004.

Though this study does not have the space for an examination of Renaissance France's position to the Hellenistic world, the reception of antique treatises in France provides a valuable beginning to our understanding of the unique character of French uses of ancient ornament. It is worthwhile to move beyond ornament as defined through art historical scholarship and to re-examine classical sources in an attempt to understand the greater complexity with which they would have been received in France in the early modern era.

## 2.2 Historical Antecedents

The literature that discusses grotesques goes back most famously to Vitruvius (80BCE-15 BCE) and his pronouncement on the monstrous qualities of the ornament. Developing a historical progression in the subjects of wall-painting, he encounters the grotesque and writes:

On the stucco are monsters rather than definite representations taken from definite things. Instead of columns there rise up stalks; instead of gables, striped panels with curled leaves and volutes. Candelabra uphold pictured shrines and above the summits of these, clusters of thin stalks arise from their roots in tendrils with little figures seated upon at random. Again, slender stalks with heads of men and of animals attached to half the body.<sup>37</sup>

Vitruvius goes on to inveigh against the “falsehoods” that such designs offer, sustaining a critique in which he asserts, “Minds darkened by imperfect standards of taste cannot discern the combination of impressiveness with a reasoned scheme of decoration.”<sup>38</sup> He was reacting to an influx of Alexandrian or eastern influences that he viewed as diluting the directly mimetic effects

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<sup>37</sup> Vitruvius, Book vii, 3. See Loeb edition: Vitruvius Pollio, and Frank Granger. *On Architecture*. The Loeb classical library. London: W. Heinemann, 1931. Vol. II, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup> Vitruvius, bk, vii, 4.

of good Roman painting. His critique is based on the grotesques' distance from the notion of "reality" and furthermore rests on the ornament's calculated disassembly of structure, including that of the body. This passage has been taken up by many writers on the grotesque and is used as the basis for the understanding of how the grotesque could work in a transgressive way.<sup>39</sup> But there are certain aspects of Vitruvius' thought on decoration that were controversial in the sixteenth century. He offers some basis for artistic license when he states "Even if they have a fine and craftsman-like finish, they are only to receive commendation if they exhibit their proper subject without transgressing the rules of art." For the sixteenth century artist, these 'rules of art' were only newly being defined, and the fact that grotesques were being so widely used suggests weariness on the part of artists and patrons alike to adhere so subserviently to Vitruvius' dictates. But the passage poses an interesting question: were there grotesques that were being produced that actually had narrative components or pure mimetic functions? Was there a larger variety of grotesque pictures, and were there ways that artists could experiment in this mode of decoration and still maintain the 'rules of art'? These must have been tantalizing questions for the Renaissance artist.

Most scholarship on Vitruvius in the past decade places him securely in a very conservative position within the arts of ancient Rome, and his work is no longer taken as being representative of de facto art production of the era. Nonetheless, when reading his statements on wall-painting more broadly, the possibilities for what these images did and did not do, become more compelling. Vitruvius objects to the luxurious quality of the environments in which such images were painted. His critique of grotesques is quickly followed by a tale of Tralles, a city in

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<sup>39</sup> See Epps (1995), Rosen (1990), Maiorino (1991).

which new wall-paintings were created for a theater called the Small Assembly. The architecture depicted in these frescoes included elements falsely supported on statues or centaurs. The local mathematician, Licymnius, then implores the inhabitants of the city to not be taken in by the fantasies of these images,

Let us see to it that our stage scenery with its pictures does not make us citizens of Alabanda or Abdera! For who of you can have above your roof tiles, buildings with columns and elaborate gables? For the latter stand upon floors, not above the roof tiles. If therefore, we approve in pictures what cannot justify itself in reality, we are added to those cities which, because of such faults, are esteemed slow witted.<sup>40</sup>

Vitruvius conflates not only a criticism of wasteful luxury (in the allusion to Alabanda) but the speech of Licymnius also firmly establishes the necessity for the aesthetics of a city to maintain its values. It is essentially a plea for civic pride, exercised through virtuous means of representation where subjects depicted only communicate what is verifiable. The alternative is to fall into tomfoolery — “O that heaven would raise Licymnius to life” Vitruvius pleads, “and amend this madness, and the roving fashions of the fresco-painters!”<sup>41</sup>

For Vitruvius, grotesque decoration lacked the sober qualities of the Augustan ideal, and could only be used when it adhered to a rigorous standard of mimesis. This was a position in keeping with the Empire under Augustus (27 BCE- 14 CE), and shows a theoretical favor for the classical ideal re-embraced upon Augustus’ ascension to the head of state. It reflects the way that Augustus was attempting to fashion himself within the public eye, one that embraced solidly Roman values, above those of exotic, eastern influences which were now associated with the

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<sup>40</sup> Vitruvius, vii, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, vii, 7.

vanquished forces at Actium. Augustus advocated a re-engagement and consolidation of Roman holdings, and initiated an aesthetic program whereby images were meant to enunciate his role as protector of Rome's vast bounty. Vitruvius inveighs against grotesque decoration precisely because it fell outside of this ideal, while also simultaneously acknowledging the seductive power of ornament. Grotesques that were discovered in the 1480s in Rome in what was the unknown ruin of the Domus Aurea, however, appeared at a much different moment in Roman history.

Under Nero (r. 54-68 CE), the art of the Roman Empire shifted away from the sober classicism that had held sway since Augustus. With a keen interest in architecture, and a penchant for extravagant, often Eastern inflected forms of luxury, Nero commissioned the Domus Aurea to serve as an opulent palace for himself in the heart of Rome. Equipped with novel architectural spaces, domed rooms and vast quantities of mosaics, the palace would have been a resplendent sequence from room to room. It is during this period that his painter Famulus, known for painting while dressed in a toga, painted or oversaw the painting of what archaeologists now consider the Second Style of Roman painting. This style departed from previous examples in that it aimed to create illusionistic spaces that often suggested fields of greater depth or fantastical scenes. These paintings played a fiction on the walls of the palace, and represent exactly what Vitruvius, in his strict allegiance to Augustan classicism so despised. And he was not his only critic, Pliny the Elder writes,

He [Famulus] only painted a few hours each day, and then with the greatest gravity, for he always kept the toga on, even when in the midst of his implements. The Golden Palace of Nero was the prison-house

of this artist's productions, and hence it is that there are so few of them to be seen elsewhere.<sup>42</sup>

But in fact, the Second Style as we now know continued to flourish in the Empire as is evidenced by the large number of such paintings in the houses uncovered at Pompeii and Herculaneum. And not coincidentally, the reemergence of the fashion for grotesques in the 18<sup>th</sup> century coincides with the new discoveries of the paintings at these sites.

Hetty Joyce points out that the remains of the Domus Aurea were not correctly identified in the Renaissance, and were conflated with those of the nearby Baths of Titus.<sup>43</sup> This is important especially because many of the interior spaces that came to incorporate grotesque ornament were Renaissance baths or other intimate spaces, a theme that will be further explored in Chapter 2. The informality of these spaces also suggests some of the reasons that Renaissance artists felt no compunction to adhere rigidly to Vitruvius's proscriptions for this type of ornament. Vitruvius condemns the public aspects of wall paintings but in the Renaissance, especially in France, grotesques often adorned private spaces. This division between public and private uses of the grotesques was not concretized however, and this project explores some very public embellishments employing grotesque imagery.<sup>44</sup>

The pervasiveness of grotesques may perhaps owe more to a temporal conflation whereby all ruins were deemed worthwhile, but a stance that would have shifted with greater reading and comprehension of the ancient sources. The combinatory figures so commonly found

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<sup>42</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 35:37. See Pliny, and H. Rackham. *Natural history*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1938.

<sup>43</sup> Joyce, Hetty. 1992. "Grasping at Shadows: Ancient Paintings in Renaissance and Baroque Rome". *Art Bulletin*. 74, no. 2: 219-246. See page 219. She further notes that the site was not identified as the Domus Aurea until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 5 on Toulouse.



in grotesques were repeatedly invoked in ancient literary sources. They were employed in classical debates on the nature of license, and ornament's role in rhetorical practice. Emerging from the ekphrastic and hence highly visual method of pedagogy, fantastic creatures were often used in classical literature to test the limits of literary decorum. For instance, Horace (65 BCE-27 BCE) derides the hybridity of a make-believe creature evoked by lesser poets:

If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, and to spread feathers of many a hue over limbs picked up now here now there, so that what at the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish, could you, my friends, if favored with a private view, refrain from laughing? Believe me, dear Pisos, quite like such pictures would be a book, whose idle fancies shall be shaped like a sick-man's dreams, so that neither head nor foot can be assigned to a single shape. 'Painters and poets' you say, 'have always had an equal right in hazardizing anything.' We know it: this license we poets claim and in our own turn we grant the like; but not so far that savage should mate with tame, or serpents couple with birds, lambs with tigers.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly, Horace makes a distinction between the practices of painters, and those of poets, but for both, he suggests a certain level of decorum is necessary to maintain a modicum of credibility to an image. He contrasts what can be seen in Nature with what cannot, and through the device of the grotesque image, attempts to rein in the "license" of poets.

The first humanist commentary on Horace's *Ars Poetica* was published in Florence in 1482, and shortly following, Iodocus Badius Ascensius (Josse Bade, 1462-1535) published his

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<sup>45</sup> Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 1-13. See Horace, and H. Rushton Fairclough. *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978.

commentary in Paris in 1500.<sup>46</sup> Like Philandrier's commentary on Vitruvius in 1544, Badius' attempted to clarify aspects of Horace's text.<sup>47</sup> Ann Moss has pointed out that Badius not only offered commentary on Horace, but also included references to previous authors of similar commentaries, creating a stratigraphic reading of opinions on Horace's work.<sup>48</sup> Where Horace's text delineated the divide between Nature and its opposite and further what constituted decorous speech/poetics, Badius wrote that on Horace's approach to poetry,

The matter is three-fold: either altogether true, something which actually occurred, as in histories; or not true, but truth-like, something which could have occurred, such as the plots of comedies; or neither truth nor truth-like, such as many poetic fables, for example, Virgil's ships changing to nymphs, and many of the metamorphoses in Ovid; yet these fables should be examined for some meaningful substance, either physical, historical, or mystical.<sup>49</sup>

Badius's commentary then presents us with a French Renaissance reading of Horace's poetics that attempts to open up the parameters of artistic license through its invocation of previous authors, as well as to distinguish between Horace's views and his own. He offered his audience a diversified approach to the text, and the very practice of composing the commentary established his own liminal place between antiquity and his audience. He suggests that not only

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<sup>46</sup> Ann Moss asserts that Horace did not have the Medieval 'impedimenta' of Cicero, and commentaries from the Middle Ages that did exist, tended to be "prescriptive reading of Horace's poetics". See Moss, Ann. "Horace in the sixteenth century: commentators into critics" in Kennedy, George A. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Vol. III The Renaissance. p. 66-76. See page 66.

<sup>47</sup> For Philandrier, see *In decem libros M. Vitruvii Pollionis de architectura annotationes*. Rome, Giovanni Andrea Dossena, 1544.

<sup>48</sup> Moss (1989), 68.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Moss, 1989, p. 69. Moss is translating from the *Quint. Horatii Flacci de arte poetica opusculum aureum*. Paris: J. Petit, 1505, fol. viii.

should Horace be challenged, but also that the ‘fables’ on which Horace’s work rests, should also be re-examined.

Lucretius (99 BCE-55BCE) was likewise published in France by Jean Petit with a commentary by Badius in 1514. Even more so than Horace, his pagan and Epicurean background posed a number of problems for the sixteenth century translators of his work. Like Horace, he used figures made of combinations of elements to create fantastic creatures in the mind’s eye that defy what is known from Nature. But for Lucretius, the existence of such creatures in the imagination points to the faculties of man’s perception, writing

This is why monsters with their hodgepodge limbs appear to us,  
Such as Centaurs and Scyllas, hounds with heads like Cerberus—  
And phantoms of the dead, whose bones lie in the Earth’s embrace  
Because all kinds of images are floating every place.  
Some of them spontaneously arise out of thin air,  
And some are shed from sundry different objects, and a share  
Are formed of combinations of these figures, For it’s fair  
To say no image of a centaur possibly could derive  
(When there is no such thing in Nature) from one that is *live*.  
But when the images of horse and man do chance to meet,  
They easily adhere at once, which is, as I repeat,  
Due to their gauzy fabric and the fineness of their texture.  
Other hybrids of this sort are formed in the same manner,  
And since they travel swiftly, for they are exceedingly light,  
As earlier I’ve demonstrated, any of these slight  
Images easily sets the mind in motion with a touch —  
The mind’s so fine and quick to move that it does not take much.<sup>50</sup>

Lucretius draws from the litany of fantasy creatures in an exercise to illustrate the way that man creates and responds to the world of illusion, where perception is a thin membrane between

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<sup>50</sup> Lucretius, *De rerum naturae*, Book IV, 731-748. See Lucretius, Carus T, Ettore Paratore, and W H. D. Rouse. *Lucretius, De Rerum Natura*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Nature and its opposite. This passage suggests his Epicurean belief that the fantasy realm is outside of man, and waiting to be encountered. This belief in multiple worlds was of course problematic in the eyes of the sixteenth century church. Nonetheless, Lucretius' work was very popular, especially in France, where an emergent skepticism was taking hold. The ancient author offers his reader a certain liberation from the dogmatic world of reality defined through the Augustinian-Thomistic paradigm, and instead was instrumental in broadening the discourse not only of perception in the sixteenth century, but of fantasy as well. By the end of the sixteenth century, Lucretius was one of the pillars on which Montaigne staked his claim for the skeptics' position in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond* and would be a foundational figure for the development of Cyrano de Bergerac's thought.<sup>51</sup>

After a number of successful printings of Badius's commentary, Lambinus (1520-1572) produced a new one, published in both Lyon and Paris in 1563. It went through a number of successive re-printings. Like Badius, he confronted Lucretius' views that were anathema to the sixteenth century audience, such as his denial of religion, but Lambinus nonetheless holds him as an exemplar, writing that *De rerum natura* was "adorned, distinguished, and embellished with all the merits of genius" and he felt that a contemporary audience was perfectly capable of dealing with the problematic aspects of the work.<sup>52</sup> Scientific observation was gradually developing in France in the sixteenth century, and it is no coincidence that the closely observed aspects of Nature that appear within Renaissance grotesques coincide with the observation of Nature

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<sup>51</sup> See Fraisse, Simone. *L'influence De Lucrèce En France Au Seizième Siècle: Une Conquête Du Rationalisme*. Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1962.

<sup>52</sup> Lambinus quote appears on p. 228-229, in Philip Ford "Lucretius in early modern France" in Gillespie, Stuart, and Philip R. Hardie. *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Ford notes other important editions as well. He further notes the importance of Lucretius's poem to the development of scientific poetry in sixteenth century France, notably that of Maurice Scève. p. 229.

outside. Texts such as *De rerum natura* opened the doors to the world beyond what was known, and moved into the field of observation of Nature at different scales, and of course, further on to the worlds uninhabited by man, such as the world of fantasy. Lucretius aided the poet and painter alike in drawing out juxtapositions between what could be seen vs. unseen, dark/light, or form/formlessness. Clashing like the body of a horse with the body of a man in combination, Lucretius' thought formed a background to which artists and poets began to experiment with juxtaposition, variance in scales, and combinations. The notion of diversity of matter, the profusion of textures, colors, and tones became part of a new aesthetic appeal of poetry and art in the century, creating an articulation of form that would be well served by the sensuousness of Gothic aesthetics. Culling from Lucretius' oeuvre, Ronsard writes to Cassandre in his 1552 *Amours*,

Les petitz corps, culbutans de travers,  
 Parmi leur cheute en byaiz vagabonde  
 Hurtez ensemble, ont composé le monde  
 S'entracrochans d'acrochementz divers.<sup>53</sup>

Bringing together the atoms that form the matter of the world, Ronsard creates a sense of order emerging from a background of diverse patterns. Drawing more of the mythological qualities from Lucretius' work, he eschews the problematic aspects of Lucretius' thought, and instead develops a poetry common to the Pléaïde, one that borrows the tactile examples of the didactic

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<sup>53</sup> Ronsard, Pierre de, Henri Weber, and Catherine Weber. *Les amours*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1998. p. 25.

poem, but forgoing the content of the original.<sup>54</sup> Ronsard sets an ornate emotional tone here, contrasting his own feelings for his love, with the “hurtez ensemble” of the small atoms that will define the world.

Virgil (70 BCE-19 BCE) likewise uses the figure of Scylla for its combinatory effects in his *Aeneid*, “above, she is of human form, down to the waist a fair-bosomed maiden; below, she is a sea-dragon of monstrous frame, with dolphins' tails joined to a belly of wolves.”<sup>55</sup> The *Aeneid* served as a model for Renaissance poets for its epic length and narrative, and for the fact that it served so well to flatter Virgil’s emperor, Augustus. In France, the text became a template for Ronsard’s *Franciade*, and inspired a number of commentaries, and illustrated versions. Badius also oversaw a translation of the *Aeneid* in 1501 in Paris, and noted editions include Louis de Masure’s translation of 1560 that appeared in Lyon.<sup>56</sup> François Rigolot has described the approach of French poets of the sixteenth century to Virgil as a relationship that emphasized Virgil’s work almost as a painter, his imagery considered so vivid that it promulgated what Rigolot terms a “rhetoric of presence”.<sup>57</sup> In the sixteenth century, artists and poets attempted to create forms that resided so emphatically in the mind that they had this sense of virtual presence. Wall moldings at Fontainebleau for example were made so three-dimensional that they appear to emerge off the wall, and poets such as Marot used juxtaposed forms that emphasized visuality.

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<sup>54</sup> Lucretius would come to dominate seventeenth century thought, and was a source for the development of Enlightenment thought.

<sup>55</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, III.425-428

<sup>56</sup> Virgil, Josse Badius, Maffeo Vegio, Servius, and Filippo Beroaldo. *Aeneis Vergiliana*. Paris: A Thielma[n]no Keruer coimpressa, venundantus Andegauis a Ioanne Alexandro, 1501. Virgil, and Masures L. Des. *L'eneïde De Virgile*. Lion: par Ian de Tournes imprimeur du Roy, 1560.

<sup>57</sup> Rigolot, François. “The rhetoric of presence: art, literature, and illusion” in Kennedy, George A. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. See Volume 3, The Renaissance, 1999. p. 161-167. This phrasing is also unique to Plett, Heinrich F. *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004.

*Ornement* in France retained the deeply articulated forms so abundant in Gothic aesthetics and inserted new motifs into this system. This profusion of such robust forms was so ubiquitous that it served to foundationalize artistic and literary practice in the sixteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

In the case of Virgil's Scylla, the body is what is being extended and materialized. Distortion of the body in classical myth is not uncommon, but when this trope interlaced with the sixteenth century disciplines of anatomy and scientific observation, the body became more common in the arts, and the distortion of it became a motif for everything from jokes, such as the farting and defecating in Gargantua and Pantagruel, to entertainment, such as the *I Modi*, printed in Italy, to macabre scenes of violence in various martyrologies. The body of the King was especially important visually in France, due to the Salic law and the monarch's necessary duty to procreate, and provide a male heir to the throne.

In grotesque ornament, the body has a constant presence, and often these bodies are distorted, growing into parts of architecture, or other animals, such as satyrs, or they are on display in the nude. Bodies in grotesque ornament are very rarely represented as mimetic copies of the human form, although this does change in seventeenth century grotesques. Such bodies adorned a variety of surfaces, from cups to facades in the sixteenth century. So common did they become, that later on in Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Les Fers*, Catherine de Medici is turned into a modern Scylla, but instead of animal parts, she is now a heaving mass of architectural fragments,

Ce que premier il trouve à son advenement

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<sup>58</sup> This effort to visualize the rhetoric of abundance is a key theme in Rebecca Zorach's important art historical study, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Fut le preparitif du brave bastiment  
 Que desseignoit pour lors la peste Florentine.  
 De dix mille maisons il voua la ruine  
 Pour estoffe au dessein. Le serpent captieux  
 Entra dans cette Royne et, pour y entrer mieux,  
 Fit un corps aéré de columns parfaites,  
 De pavillons hautains, de folles girouettes,  
 De domes accomplis, d'escaliers sans noyaux,  
 Fenestrages dorés, pilasters et portaux,  
 De sales, cabinets, de chambres, galleries,  
 En fin d'un tel project que sont les Tuilleries.  
 Comme idée il gagna l'imagination,  
 Du chef de Jesabel il print possession:  
 L'ardent desir logé avorte d'autres vices,  
 Car ce qui peut troubler ces desseins d'edifices  
 Et condamné à mort par ces volans desires  
 A qui le sang n'est cher pour servir aux plaisirs.<sup>59</sup>

Using scalar distortion and a vivid shift in perspective, D'Aubigné launches his critique of Catherine's patronage of architecture and her rule. She is literally possessed by the structure, representing the same sort of artificial rendering of weight and space that sits at the root of grotesque imagery. Instead of the reedy columns improbably holding up capitals as Vitruvius relates this form, here the building, a vast complex invades the body (and mind) of the female figure. This passage hits on an all-important aspect of the grotesque image: Long writes, that d'Aubigné "insists on a very concrete description of the palace, thus emphasizing the two disjunctive perspectives, and their impossible coexistence...this project effaces Catherine textually".<sup>60</sup> Regardless of the operation, grotesque imagery is always anchored with realistic elements, recognizable to the viewer, but distorted in the service of the artist or writer's

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<sup>59</sup> Thank you to Kathleen Perry Long for pointing out this text to me. From "Les Fers", 193-210, quoted in Long, Kathleen Perry. "Improper Perspective: Anamorphosis in d'Aubigné's *Les Tragiques*." *Mediaevalia* 22 (1999): 103-26. Originally published as "L'anamorphose dans l'œuvre de Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné," *Albineana* 8 (1997): 77-95.

<sup>60</sup> Long, 113.



intention. In the case of d'Aubigné's text, that level of realistic detailing is pushed to the limit of perception, but this is what ultimately serves his agenda, the absurdity of the intervening distortion.<sup>61</sup>

### 2.3 The Literary Remains of the Site: Caves and Grottoes

The same book, III, of the Aeneid has a passage that defines the mystical properties of the cave. This description follows closely behind the description of Scylla. Virgil describes the rocky domicile of a seer at Avernus,

who deep in a rocky cave sings the Fates and entrusts to leaves signs and symbols. Whatever verses the maid has traced on leaves she arranges in order and stores in the cave. These remain unmoved in their places and quit not their rank; but when at the turn of a hinge a light breeze has stirred them, and the open door scattered the tender foliage, never there after does she care to catch them, as they flutter in the rocky cave, nor to recover their places, nor to unite the verses; uncounselled, men depart, and loathe the sibyll's seat.<sup>62</sup>

Calling to mind the illegibility of grotesque wall paintings, the seer's cave recalls the site so important to the grotesque's meaning, in its mysterious qualities, where men gather to behold their fortunes. It was a familiar trope in the Renaissance, and would inform the design of grottoes

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<sup>61</sup> This interstitial space is discussed in the ancient sources as well. See especially Quintilian, Book 8.3 deals with ornament and the use of license in rhetoric/poetry, while the bulk of Book 9 deals with Figures of speech and artistic structure. Additionally, Socrates says to Phaedrus (229 C-D) "But I, Phaedrus, think such explanations are very pretty in general, but are the inventions of a very clever and laborious and not altogether enviable man, for no other reason than because after this he must explain the forms of the Centaurs, and then that of the Chimaera, and there presses in upon him a whole crowd of such creatures, Gorgons and Pegas, and multitudes of strange, inconceivable, portentous natures. If anyone disbelieves in these, and with a rustic sort of wisdom, and undertakes to explain each in accordance with probability, he will need a great deal of leisure."

<sup>62</sup> Virgil, Aeneid, III. 443-452

in gardens in Italy, France and the Low Countries. Virgil's description offered his Renaissance reader both visual and aural qualities that gave the scene a presence in the mind. The leaves that the seer uses to read the dictates of fate are texts illegible to her audience, a facet of the story that would have been particularly appealing to a French Renaissance audience with its predilection for puzzles and games.

The term 'grote' first appears in French in 1280 in records of the Angevin court at Naples.<sup>63</sup> In the *Gestes des Chirprois*, from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, one finds a reference to the 'grote' specifically as a cave:

Et en la fin Corradin & l'on oncle duc d'Olteriche & le conte Girard de  
Pile & .j. home de Jene de grant lignage, quy avoit nom  
Thomas Elpine, quy estoit capitaine de Jene, les .iiij. foïrent de la  
bataille, & alerent près de la mer & le mirent en une grote.<sup>64</sup>

It was much later however, that 'grote' became 'grotte' and was used to designate a synthetic space, for instance in Ronsard's description of the grotto at Meudon which was part of a central pavilion of the chateau and housed antiquities. Ronsard appropriates a classical vocabulary to praise Charles of Lorraine's endeavor, writing, *Au travers d'une vigne en une sente étroite/ Gagnèrent pas à pas la Grotte de Meudon/ La Grotte que Charlot (Charlot de qui le nom/ Est saint par les forêts) a fait creuser si belle/ Pour être des neuf Soeurs la demeure éternelle*.<sup>65</sup> In the intervening two centuries, 'grotte' had moved from a naturally occurring, rocky cave to an

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<sup>63</sup> Boüiard, A. de, and Paul Durrieu. *Documents en français des archives angevines de Naples (regne de Charles Ier)*. Paris: E.de Boccard, 1933. See vol. II, 154.

<sup>64</sup> *Gestes des Chiprois*, III, 360. See Raynaud, Gaston, Philippe, and Gérard de Montréal. *Les gestes des Chiprois. Recueil de chroniques françaises écrites en Orient au XIIIe & XVIe siècles (Philippe de Navarre & Gérard de Montréal [sic])*. Genève: Impr. J.G. Fick, 1887. p. 189.

<sup>65</sup> Ronsard, Pierre de. *Chant pastoral sur les nopces de Mgr. Charles, duc de Lorraine et Madame Claude, fille II du roy: par P. de Ronsard*. Paris: A. Wechel, 1559. Accessed through <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k70015f.notice>

artificial construction that displayed links to antiquity through its contents, but also provided a foil to Nature in its often-exaggerated constructions of rocky surfaces. This playful exchange between Nature and Artifice was a further manifestation of antique debates about art versus Nature, and further about artistic license.

With the uncovering of the grottoes that held the remains of the Domus Aurea, ‘grotte’ lent itself to the term ‘grotesque’ to designate the wall paintings that would go on to become the source of the copious iterations of grotesque ornament. In France, ‘grotte’ and ‘grotesque’ collided and helped determine this change from the natural feature of the landscape to a highly orchestrated artificial site that heralded an antique past. However, often written as ‘crotesque’ an early usage can be found in contracts and inventories, such as in the inventory of Florimond Robertet, where ‘crotesque’ is used to designate ‘ornement capricieux’ and clearly no longer registers the site of the grotto, but a particular ornament.<sup>66</sup> In contracts of the period, grotesque ornament was increasingly used and indicated in generic terminology such as ‘antiquailles’ ‘rocailles’ or even ‘divers ornements’.<sup>67</sup> The artistic practices of the period suggest that grotesques as ornament fell into a highly customary exchange whereby artists and patrons used the shorthand of antique ornament to indicate a specific use of grotesques. There is a clear disparity between the uses of grotesque in literary remains of artistic production and the actual incidences of antique usage. Nonetheless, we find a sort of accident between the terms, and ‘grotesque’ never truly outgrew the associations of the cave.

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<sup>66</sup> For the inventory, see the entry “Grotesque” at <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=1921907205;>

<sup>67</sup> See discussion of contracts in Chapter 3.

## 2.4 Bakhtin and Rabelaisian ornament

Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal work, *Rabelais and His World*, has for generations now defined one pole in studies of the grotesque. This work depicts a cultural epoch from which Rabelais extracts and depicts a carnivalesque world of laughter and festivals, where the merits of high and low culture mingle. Bakhtin identifies the ornamental grotesque as the origin of the word itself, but sees this imagery of the antique grotesque as "but a fragment of the immense world of grotesque imagery which existed throughout all the stages of antiquity and continued to exist in the middle ages and the renaissance."<sup>68</sup> Bakhtin has little patience for this imagery and instead finds his subject in the interstices of popular culture. For Bakhtin, ornament is superfluous to the larger sociological themes that he hopes to draw out from the mechanics of what he defines as grotesque art and literature.

There is an abundant literature on Rabelais and the literary grotesque, but what Bakhtin ignores, as have other critics, is that there are embedded within the text of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, sly references to the grotesque as ornament. For instance:

L'invention estoit admirable, mais encores plus admirable, ce me sembloit, que le sculpteur avoit, autour de la corpulence d'icelle lampe cristalline, engravée, à ouvrage cataglyphe, une prompte et gaillarde bataille de petit enfans nuds, montez sus des petis chevaux de bois, avec lances des virolets, et pavois fait subtilement de grappes de raisins, entrelassez de pamper, avec gestes et efforts purile tant ingenieusement part art exprimez que nature mieux ne le pourroit. Et ne sembloient engravez dedans la matiere, mais en bosse, ou pour le moins en grotesque apparoissoient enlevez totalement, moyennant la diverse et plaisante lumiere, laquelle dedans contenue ressortissoit par la sculpture.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bakhtin, 33.

<sup>69</sup> Rabelais, Bk 5, ch. 40. See Rabelais, François, Jean Céard, Gérard Defaux, and Michel Simonin. *Les cinq livres*. Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1994. p. 1493.

Within this passage we find many of the characteristics consonant with grotesques during the period. Capping a short chapter that highlights the over-the-top design of a lamp that supposedly lights the Temple of Bacchus, Rabelais emulates and in turn spoofs the lavish detail given to objects ranging from those represented in the *Roman de la Rose*, to those contained within a cabinet of curiosities. But within the passage we also find naked boys, perhaps putti, engaged in a mock battle and suggestive of some lusty scene replete with Bacchanalian undertones. The *grotesque* refers to the sculptural effect in relief, and is included as if to signal to the knowing reader that a particular motif is at work. And certainly, the sheer frequency of grotesque imagery already popular by Rabelais's day would have insured that this was so. Interestingly here, the *grotesque* is represented in sculptural form, highlighting the uses of the motif across media that was occurring in the mid sixteenth century in France. The passage also suggests a sheer sense of abundance. Despite its strongly satirical tone, the passage works because of its innate sense of what constitutes lavish ornament. Each element will resonate with a particular mythology, and each mythology will reveal another layer of the enigma behind the images. The chapter as a whole is a grossly complicated affair; the structure of the lamp is never truly certain, but there is the sense of a mysterious shape to be revealed. While it may not be possible to assemble the features of the lamp as they are depicted here, the passage as a whole does suggest that quality of visual play inherent in the forms of grotesques. Coupled with the naughty doings of the little boys in the carvings, Rabelais defines the larger range of grotesque meaning: visual play with sexual undertones, coupled with a physical abundance as evidenced by Rabelais' insistence on

the carvings' high relief, "enlevez totalement".<sup>70</sup> Grotesque as genre and grotesques as motif work in tandem.

Rabelais's preoccupation with the design and ornamentation of codpieces is another such example. His idea of the grotesque as a concept pivots off of his explanation of the Renaissance body. Bakhtin however sees a radical break between the body of the Middle Ages and that of the Renaissance. He writes that this new body "was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies."<sup>71</sup> He goes on to articulate a Renaissance body in which "its protuberances and off-shoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed."<sup>72</sup> All of the cycles and banalities of life were robbed, he asserts, from the representations of the body. He posits an opposite program for the grotesque then, in which "it did not fit the framework of the 'aesthetics of the beautiful' as conceived by the Renaissance." And though he maintains that even in the work of Rabelais, there exist two canons, which he delineates as 'grotesque and classic' he nonetheless insists on presenting a work that only examines their 'fundamental differences.'<sup>73</sup>

There are myriad instances in Renaissance imagery by which Bakhtin's work could be refuted. And though Rabelais's text certainly cannot contain what we might see as the "aesthetics of the beautiful", the body is most certainly and audaciously on display. But Rabelais also embeds references of antique grotesques into his narrative, and he points out their function within the making of a normative, humanist culture, one in which body and ornament are not mutually exclusive. Returning to those codpieces, Rabelais portrays how Gargantua was dressed,

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<sup>70</sup> For more on the sexual and gender bending undertones of grotesque imagery, see Chapter 4 on *Juste de Juste*.

<sup>71</sup> Bakhtin, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

and amongst the comic excesses of his garment, it is the codpiece that garners the most lavish, ornamental rendering.

Pour la braguette: furent levees seize aunes un quartier d'icelui meme drap, et fut la forme d'icelle comme d'un arc boutant, bien estachée joyeusement à deux belles boucles d'or, que prenaient deux crochets d'émail, en un chacun desquels était enchâssée une grosse émeraude de la grosseur d'une pomme d'orange. Car (ainsi que dit Orpheus, libro de lapidus, et Pline, libro ultimo) elle a vertu erective et confortative du member naturel.<sup>74</sup>

There are essentially three features of the grotesque here that in turn defy Bakhtin's delimitations. First, there is the reference to Orpheus and Pliny which simultaneously moves us back to a classical reference point, but substantively they also reiterate the gag at the heart of the passage: male genital erection/dysfunction, and whether the emerald would have restorative or chastising properties. The second component of the antique grotesque is the overall reference to structure. The codpiece as suspended, Rabelais suggests, has the weightlessness of a flying buttress, but he goes on to articulate its artful construction: "L'exiture de la braguette était à la longueur d'une canne, déchiquetée comme les chausses, avec le damas bleu flottant comme devant."<sup>75</sup> The weightlessness of the *arc boutant* is reinforced by the presposterously hung *exiture* and then draped in floating blue damask. As we shall see, grotesque imagery again and again creates a defiant system of structures. They defy gravity, possibility and realism, and it was in fact this radicalism that compelled Vitruvius to write so disapprovingly of them. Finally the passage reveals the preoccupation with surface treatments that are consummate with a Mannerist aesthetic that embraced grotesques and grottoes. From the rough tunnels burrowed through

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<sup>74</sup> Rabelais, Book 1, Chapter 7. See Rabelais 9 (1994), 45-47.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 47.

Rome's subterranean heart to the myriad minerals and textures found in an antiquarian's collection, grotesques were but one expression of an appetite for abundance. Grotesques could be harnessed to such an aim through various media, and applied in interiors and architectural facades to like effect. Rabelais not only conjures this highly detailed, opulent quality to Mannerist art, but clearly associates it with the depiction of an ornament worn on the body. So the broad sexuality at the heart of grotesque ornament is here conflated with its other attributes, airy, preposterous structure, and visual abundance.

Rabelais not only conjures up the structures of grotesques, but he also refers to their original site: the grotto. In Book V, chapter 34, Pantagruel and his party venture underground to enter the Temple of the Bottle. He writes, "Là je disois à Pantagruel: "Ceste entrée me revoque en souvenir la cave peinte de la premiere ville du monde: car là sont peintures pareilles, en pareille fraischeur, comme icy".<sup>76</sup> Clearly there is a reference made to the form of the grotto, as it was known at the Domus Aurea that conflates the architectural ruin with the Golden Age of Man—for within the grotto we find the beginning of the world. Through his localization of the text, Rabelais clearly made a connection to Rome, perhaps to what was known of the Domus Aurea. Boucher contended that these painted caves referenced those at the chateau de Chinon, and while this may be so, in Rabelaisian fashion, there is a layering of the sites in the text.<sup>77</sup> But we find also a parallel in a poem attributed to Donato Bramante from the *Antiquarie prospecttiche romane*: Non è sí duro cor che non piangesse/ L'ampli palazzi corpi e mura rotte/ de Roma triumphante quando resse/ Hor son spelinche ruinate grotte/ Di stuccho di rilievo altri

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<sup>76</sup> Rabelais (1994), p. 1469.

<sup>77</sup> See note 5, in Rabelais (1994), p. 1468. Boucher, A. "Les caves peintes et l'authenticité du Ve livre" *BAARD*, VI, 1957, p. 157-160.



colore/ Di man di cinabuba apelle giotte.<sup>78</sup> As in Rabelais, with Bramante's passage we see the act of descending underground to witness images that seem to have their origins in a mythic past. Not only do these passages give us sites that are conferred by grotesques, they also give us actions. Both of these sites, Rabelais' fictional Temple of the Bottle and Bramante's grotto are also sites of conviviality, where likeminded individuals come together to ponder the enigmas of the past, with a ribald sociability—"Je scay, repondit Pantagruel, où est Chinon, et la cave peint aussi, j'y ay beu maints verres de vin frais, et ne fais doute aucune que Chinon ne soit ville antique, son blazon l'atteste".<sup>79</sup> And likewise in Bramante: Andiam per terra con nostre ventresche/ Con pane con presutto poma e vino/ Esser più bizarre alle grottesche. In Bramante's passage we find not only the association of leisure and ruins, but also reference to the very physical act of exploring ruins. Bramante's notion that "andiam per terra con nostre ventresche" strikes a counterpoint to Bakhtin's notion that the classical grotesque somehow lacks the physicality or full-bodiedness of his grotesque realism.

What the examples from Rabelais and Bramante suggest in two very different ways is that there is a nexus of meaning to classical grotesques. They present a conflation of body, environment, and image at work, and that through this relationship, the remnants of antique culture were being explored. They are the images to which artists and their elite patrons migrated because of their links to antiquity, their unique grotto location that required real physical effort to approach, and the sociability that came with trying to decipher their meaning with others. This visual play was also contingent upon their exceedingly dense components. Grotesques offered a

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Rowland, Ingrid D. *The Culture of the High Renaissance: ancients and moderns in sixteenth-century Rome*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 290-291 for the text.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

profusion of details and could be transplanted to various surfaces, from the engraved image to the carved wood of an interior studiolo.

Where Bakhtin's ideas do have a currency is where they consider the grotesque as a means to "dialogue and participation" but only in a very literal sense. One must be mindful of Bakhtin's context, and that grotesques do not make for a world "freed from both bourgeois and totalitarian cultures."<sup>80</sup> Rather, antique grotesques are an essentially codified language; one must have the keys to understand them. They belong to the rarified field of humanistic endeavor, and despite what may be perceived as their popular appeal, their provocative manner is hedged on their opacity. They have hidden meanings that beg for the audience with an arsenal of classically derived reference points. This is precisely why they were used by the elites of French society: they promote dialogue and participation, but only within a limited social and ideological circle. When Bakhtin writes of the grotesque as a leveling carnivalesque mode where the carnival "is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people,"<sup>81</sup> certainly we can merely intuit that grotesques so expressed, simply did not exist in the ideologically conservative confines of the Valois and Bourbon courts. And even if there was some truth to such assertions in the sixteenth century, certainly by the reign of Louis XIV, any overtures to dissent had simply been snuffed out.

And yet clearly there are motives in popular culture throughout the early modern period that sought to undermine existing regimes: from Gargantua's disdain for the denizens of Paris to

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<sup>80</sup> Yates, Wilson. "An Introduction to the grotesque: theoretical and theological considerations" in Adams, James Luther, Wilson Yates, and Robert Penn Warren. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997. p. 22.

<sup>81</sup> Bakhtin, 7.

Daumier's representation of the forlorn in his prints. Lumped together, such examples have been lauded as "the grotesque" in action, but they clearly run contrary to the uses of the antique grotesque. Despite Vitruvius' declarations of grotesques as "monstrous", clearly Renaissance artists did not bind themselves to this view, finding instead through these forms' very idiosyncrasies, the crux of a new vocabulary. Though the seventeenth century sees grotesques sublimated according to a new Vitruvian fundamentalism, they are nonetheless absorbed into a system of representation linking the body of the king and the territory of the nation, as will be elucidated below.

## **2.5 Contemporary Commentary on Grotesque Ornament**

There have been a number of works that have considered grotesques as images, notably those of Nicole Dacos, Andre Chastel, Philippe Morel, and most recently Alessandra Zamperini, all of which will be further discussed below. These studies have been profoundly helpful, often illuminating not just the relationships between images, but artists and places as well. A number of scholars have also sought to include Fontainebleau as it flourished under François I, but as yet there has not been a comprehensive study of grotesques in France as they developed through the early modern era. But before we can launch into French grotesques, it is necessary to review some of the literature that has defined previous studies of this subject.

The scholarship on grotesque imagery has certain recurring themes. Art historians since the mid twentieth century have rooted the grotesque motif in discourses on ornament, and follow Gombrich's work closely. They also have looked to André Chastel's small book *La Grottesque*,

which appeared in 1988, just two years before he passed away. All of these works tend to treat grotesque imagery along an evolutionary, progressive development. Many of these texts have been produced by art professionals working in museums, and hence part of the source for the connoisseurial nature of this work. Despite Gombrich's recognition that the many celebrated artists such as Durer made grotesques, there is still a prevailing notion that grotesques were a lesser art form, as is the case with ornament at large. Third, most art historians writing about the grotesque motif do not recognize, nor do they render, the vast variety of forms that it could take. This also leads to the point that most analysis only sees grotesques as discrete, ornamental flourishes, and there has been little research done to assert how much grotesques specifically, and ornament in general shaped viewing practices, and to condition the very process of looking. Lastly, grotesques are still seen as being marginal, though this has come under greater debate, thanks especially to Gombrich, to Chastel, and to Chastel's protégé Philippe Morel.

By the mid-1960's, what had become abundantly obvious was that a new study was necessary in order to ascertain the impact of the decorations of the Domus Aurea on visual culture. The abundant meanings of grotesque had to be stripped away, and scholars needed to return to the material culture of grotesques itself. Nicole Dacos' *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance*, a careful and detailed study attempted to fill this gap.<sup>82</sup> Her study of the diffusion and discovery of grotesques ranges over three parts, with an additional last chapter aimed at understanding the fate of grotesques over the course of the sixteenth century. Supplementing the images of the Domus Aurea, Dacos suggests that both

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<sup>82</sup> Dacos, Nicole. *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance*. London: Warburg Institute, 1969.

the Northern Entrance of the Colosseum and the baths at Hadrian's Villa may have contributed to knowledge of Roman painting during the Renaissance. She defines the broad arc of grotesque production in categories titled *Formation*, *Diffusion* and *Maturation*, and assigns to each of these categories a handful of artists. However, these assignments are not without controversy, nor do they represent a solid chronology. Under *Formation* for instance, she lumps Pinturicchio and Signorelli, while what she considers *Maturation* is clearly dominated by Raphael and his studio.

Dacos' views on how and why grotesques flourished during the sixteenth century are equally complicated. She sees grotesques as having a clearly designed set of pictorial rules, acting as a modular system, and could be deconstructed and reformed ad infinitum. This aspect of ease of use, she says allows for a greater accessibility to the legions of artists that perhaps lacked the skills to properly draft or render a finely tuned figurative art. And to go further, Dacos sees a crisis of figurative art during the sixteenth century that both stimulated a desire for elaborately ornamented images and decidedly un-classical ornamentation. She also suggests that grotesques allowed artists compensation because it allowed them greater experimentation in the margins of images where the author claims grotesques found their purely decorative homes.

To what degree these points may be valid on the Italian peninsula is beyond the scope of the present work. However, such points cannot be made so easily for France. At the French court, grotesques were analogous to a renewed interest in the human form. In French art especially during the sixteenth century, the seeming contradictions of realist form and fantastical image could be reconciled, and their narrative power derived through this potent juxtaposition and was embraced not only by lower tier artists but also by those dominant figures such as Primaticcio and Rosso Fiorentino. Moreover, the issue of marginality became an enduring source

for visual play with grotesques. In France, they proved liminal elements within images, shifting from the outside – in, and vice-versa. Their very marginality became part of their underlying subject. To that extent, grotesques were not compensation for artists at the French court, nor were they ludic elements with no aim, but served as a central theme in visual culture.

Like a number of other art historians, Dacos also argues that grotesques essentially vanished during the Counter-Reformation, but this was not true in France. Though they are clearly less prominent, seventeenth century French art kept grotesques close at hand and continued to use them through successive reigns. To support her position, Dacos points out the extensive use of Vitruvius to delineate and suppress grotesques' monstrous character during the sixteenth century. But despite her assertions, these tracts did not wholly eliminate grotesques, and in France this sort of purist Vitruvianism ran rampant, and yet grotesques were continually used through a variety of media. Nonetheless, she efficiently demonstrates how grotesques assumed the legacy of Gothic ornament, and she readily conveys the romantic spirit that motivated curiosity and their adoption in the first place.

Dacos' conception is one in which she traces chronologically a progressive interpretation of grotesques, from their first adoption in 'minor arts' of the fifteenth century to how they are transformed into the strong current of fantasy found in sixteenth century art. Within this mix we begin to see the metamorphosing figures, the satyrs, sirens and other beasts that defied the laws of nature. Her perspective is largely from the artists as makers/agents within this system, and her consideration of reception is largely from artist to artist or via their communities. In short, she is tracing an evolution of images, essentially isolating her topic within a specific twentieth century

art historical paradigm. Her interpretation is still the standard bearer for the largely connoisseurial works on grotesques that have proliferated since its publication.

Wrestling with many of the same problems as Chastel, and finding the modernist dismissal of ornament a problem that needed redressing, P.W. Ward-Jackson argues for an independence of ornament, writing that “far from being subordinate to the functional requirements of design, ornament is often the factor which determines the shape of a functional object” and further a “certain autonomy”.<sup>83</sup> In doing so, he offers the example for instance of lyre shaped chair backs by Robert Adam that while not the most obvious for the chair, was keeping contextually with the resurgent taste for classical ornament of the period. While Ward-Jackson’s article tends to generate the Italo-centric genealogy of previous studies, his work does consider the larger contextual basis that ornament and in particular, grotesques can have. But there are great oversights such as his complete neglect of the role of Giovanni da Udine in the formation of the Raphael grotesques at the Vatican<sup>84</sup>, but it also suggests, perhaps inadvertently the impact of Raphael’s association with this decorative motif. Highly admired in France, Raphael was much collected and certainly emulated.<sup>85</sup> The grotesques associated with his workshop would have had a profound impact on the further iteration of the motif in France.

Ward-Jackson is most concerned with establishing the formal genesis of the motif. He differentiates grotesques strongly by the vertical nature of many of their compositions and relates them especially to the use of the pilaster, “the pilaster had been since Roman days one of the

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<sup>83</sup> Ward-Jackson, P. W. “Some Main Streams and Tributaries in European Ornament from 1500 to 1750, Part I.” *Victoria and Albert Museum Bulletin*. April 1967, Vol III, No. 2. London, England: H.M.S.O., 1969. p. 58-70, see page 59.

<sup>84</sup> Ward-Jackson, p.65

<sup>85</sup> Rosenberg, Martin. *Raphael and France: The Artist As Paradigm and Symbol*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

most decorated parts of architecture and had often enclosed ornament of the candelabrum type, with which Italians had been familiar long before the grotesque was revived.”<sup>86</sup> He further discusses the ways in which vertical grotesques were “strengthened” by their combination with candelabrum and others were likewise “strengthened” by the introduction of borders that could act as the “scaffold” such as in the work of Du Cerceau. He also observed as many other scholars have, a parallel development and the use of strap work, again underscoring this idea of giving a greater density or volume to the grotesque. This development has been traced essentially to the confluence of artistic tastes that were developing both in France and in the Low Countries, but Ward-Jackson gives most of the credit for this development to “artists from the North” rather than seeing this as a part of a much larger artistic exchange that was taking place between the courts of France and those of the North.<sup>87</sup>

Philippe Morel in *Les Grotesques: Les figures de l’imaginaire dans la peinture italienne de la fin de la Renaissance* takes a more integrated approach. He situates grotesques firmly in the larger paradigm of a mannerist aesthetic, one which Shearman himself might have denoted as a “culture of curiosity.”<sup>88</sup> Morel limits his topic to the mid to late sixteenth century, focusing on those works, mostly in central Italy that benefitted from the years after the initial reception of the grotesque in which artists began to freely adapt these images to the current culture. He moreover situates them contextually, seeing a strident parallel within the use of grotesques, with the growth of other aesthetic systems of the period such as the burlesque mode of literature, as well as in imprese and emblems.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>88</sup> Shearman, John K. G. *Mannerism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967. p. 68



Perhaps most importantly, Morel rejects the notion that grotesques are purely fantastical, positing instead a system whereby they have their own sets of rules, their own logic (as can be seen in Serlio). This is commensurate with how he views ornament as a whole, which he acknowledges also had its own areas of invention but was likewise coupled with prescriptions. While Morel too carves out a chronological reading of mid to late century grotesques, he is also interested in what can be described as a contextual and combinatory approach to the images. He insists that formal analysis alone is not enough to understand this system, and that individual elements can be too facilely interpreted without situating grotesques within the broader category of mannerist works. He suggests that grotesques never have their own narrative arc and persistently evade such readings. This he writes, pitches grotesques into an irregular status, without monolithic meanings or referents, and he then refers the reader back to general works on ornament.

Morel does spend some time developing the notion of the monstrous within the corpus of grotesque works, and he sees this as a corollary to their exclusion from aesthetic programs of the Tridentine era, a similar development to what Dacos found. And like Dacos, his story of the grotesque, though much broader, is essentially a book of ideas, his work is nonetheless conceived as a discourse of makers. There is little on reception in his study, and little on the patrons of grotesques as well. He defines a system that runs a close parallel to the development of mannerism, and thus situates his work within a narrow perception of the art of the period. His work is also heavily dependent on that of André Chastel, which I will address below.

Alessandra Zamperini in her *Ornament and the grotesque: fantastical decoration from antiquity to art nouveau* still contends that grotesques had a subversive quality.<sup>89</sup> For artists in the Renaissance she writes, “the grotesque could not have failed to represent an intriguing form of visual subversion”.<sup>90</sup> Zamperini clearly outlines the Roman conception of grotesque paintings, but alas, it is difficult to know how much of this would have filtered down to Renaissance France. She rightly finds parallels with aspects of medieval art, contained in her chapter, “The Fantastic in the Middle Ages”. By doing so, she opens up the discursive opportunities of eastern motifs meeting with those of western Europe, creating what Zamperini determined the “hybridization of imagery”<sup>91</sup>, a notion which ultimately sets them further apart. Nonetheless, the thread of antique decoration, while not wholly lost, does grow into a bewildering web of motifs. She pointedly writes, “What we find are not revivals clearly and unequivocally deducible from the Neronian repertoire or its later derivation, but rather spurious re-elaborations that originate from Roman motifs more in substance than in form.”<sup>92</sup>

All three of these sources contain many of the same aspects, a narrow focus on the works of Italy, mostly during the Renaissance, an understanding of the grotesque through its makers, and a constant questioning of the grotesque’s status as ludic or fantastical. This is largely a product of late nineteenth century scholarship on grotesques, which conflated certain corpora of

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<sup>89</sup> Zamperini, Alessandra. *Ornament and the Grotesque: Fantastical Decoration from Antiquity to Art Nouveau*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008. p. 9.

<sup>90</sup> All references here were taken from the English language edition Zamperini, Alessandra. *Ornament and the Grotesque: Fantastical Decoration from Antiquity to Art Nouveau*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008. However, the initial reading of this book and the development of its summary was taken from the French edition: Zamperini, Alessandra, and Odile Ménégaux. *Les grotesques*. Paris: Citadelles & Mazenod, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> Zamperini, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Zamperini, 59.

images, such as that of Hans Vredeman de Vries, a sixteenth century specialist in the grotesque, and situating them within the dominant paradigm of art.

The present study differs in that it attempts to broaden the geographical boundaries of the reception of the grotesque, and moves beyond the sites most often associated with it.<sup>93</sup>

Grotesques may not relay a specific narrative, but may rather attempt to impart a sensation. But much scholarship of the grotesque sees only a dualistic relationship between narrative and non-narrative forms. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of what comprises grotesque ornament is rarely conclusively defined, so we find ourselves in a conundrum: the definition of grotesques certifies that it is without identity or narrative, a “nameless ornament”<sup>94</sup>, and yet this definition rests on a foundation of fuzzy notions of what actually comprises a grotesque. Writing about *rinceaux*, Michele Bimbenet Privat’s contribution to a volume on decorative arts posits a definition of the *rinceaux* as barely distinguishable from grotesques.<sup>95</sup> One way that she does differentiate between them is through their reception-- “they did not, like grotesques, enjoy a sudden return to favor in the wake of archaeological discoveries.”<sup>96</sup> The placement of the *rinceaux* is also essential, where she locates the motif largely on friezes with “vegetal garlands” and with “foliage, roses and ornaments”.<sup>97</sup> But the ways in which grotesques are easily adapted is mirrored in the variety of contexts for *rinceaux* “they are ideal for use in empty or subsidiary spaces such as frames, corners, and decorative borders, softening their angularity and broken, slender and

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<sup>93</sup> Further study could be conducted on the grotesque as a European wide movement. A number of other texts have recently appeared which attempt to do the same for other parts of Europe. These include Warncke, Carsten-Peter. *Die ornamentale Groteske in Deutschland, 1500-1650*. Berlin: V. Spiess, 1979.

<sup>94</sup> Chastel, André. *La grottesque*. Paris: Le Promeneur, 1988.

<sup>95</sup> Gruber, Alain Charles. *The History of Decorative Arts*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1994. See “Rinceaux”, p. 113-190.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

dynamic, or luxuriant and bushy.” This is all similar to grotesques until “rinceaux lose their specific identity when, no longer disposed in bands or freezes, they become one decorative element among many others, linking chimeras, terms, and “nameless’ grotesque ornaments, functionally indistinguishable from garlands, festoons, ribbons, and other connective devices.”<sup>98</sup>

Bimbenet Privat is linking grotesques within this system of operative features, but this study will aim to show that these motifs did not in fact lose their identity, but actually grow more emphatic. She also points out that rinceaux were in fact prescribed by Vitruvius “in Corinthian cornices and their proper configuration.”<sup>99</sup> And what the treatise was in fact describing was an ornament that was completely subordinate to the overall structure of the architectural element itself. Rinceaux support architecture, whereas it will be shown that grotesques that can either work for or against the visual elements of structure. As seen in Vitruvius’ critique of grotesque designs, it is apparent that one of the things that he most objects to is the subversion of solid form and the affront to the passivity of pure ornament. Rinceaux serve as the epitome of the kinds of pure decorative elements that Vitruvius envisioned as aesthetically sound. Furthermore, as Bimbenet-Privat rightly observes, rinceaux were unlike grotesques which were located specifically at the Domus Aurea and in fact, “appeared everywhere on ancient artifacts.”<sup>100</sup> But the lack of real definitions hinders her study, and the rinceaux is repeatedly confused with grotesques, revealing a general gap in the taxonomies of ornamental motifs.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 116

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>101</sup> Several of her examples are composed grotesques, such as an ornamental panel by Andrea and Birago, as well as Jean Juste’s Tomb of Louis XII. This confusion extends to the wider array of ornamental motifs including Moresques, Arabesques, and Rinceaux.

In his introduction to the same volume, Alain Gruber sees a parallel in the development of luxury decorative objects with the rise of secularism, with luxury working as a form of power.<sup>102</sup> And by birth of this newly emergent field of artistic production, Gruber suggests that the demand for such items created a new cadre of often forgotten artists to produce ornamental objects. Praising the work of his predecessor, he credits Chastel with this insight, who was to define *Ornementique*, a field of ornamental production, and “to designate the study of ornament through the ages, if truly useful and that it tacitly acknowledges the great artists of the early periods left a mark of their genius on areas in which they were not always masters of the relevant techniques.”<sup>103</sup> Like his mentor, Gruber attempts to establish a chronology for the development of the grotesque, though with novel sources. He sees a variety of cultural occurrences that set the stage for the reception of grotesque imagery. For instance, he points out the relevance of Francesco Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, in which images “attempted to construe their seemingly absurd juxtapositions as legible symbols to analogous to hieroglyphs.”<sup>104</sup> Gruber further emphasizes the importance of humanist interpretation and the development of grotesque motifs, singling out the role of Bramante, a student of Mantegna who “published a guide to the city in which he called these painted schemes grotesques.”<sup>105</sup> Gruber cites this text to suggest that usage of the term, and designation of ‘grotesques’ was being established quite early, even predating the discovery of the Domus Aurea. Further evidence for this includes the candelabra motif that had been existent on ancient Roman pilasters well before the discovery of Nero’s

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<sup>102</sup> Gruber, 14.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Palace.<sup>106</sup> He also points out that “irrational juxtapositions of figural elements were known in the ancient world as thymateria—symbols of the light of resurrection”, and appeared on furniture and sarcophagi.<sup>107</sup> He again goes back to Colonna saying that his work was the first example for three-dimensional grotesques.<sup>108</sup> While Colonna was very influential in France, there was no single stream of influence. Gruber himself delineates the importance of Zoan Andrea’s grotesques from 1505, especially on the Gaillon choir stalls of 1508; Du Cerceau was influenced by Antonio de Brescia; and one of the most important printmakers to be copied in France was Nicoletto Rosex da Modena, who had first-hand knowledge of the Domus Aurea.<sup>109</sup> While all of these influences are true, Gruber is only revealing aspects of the import of Italian ideas, and clearly France was developing its own vocabulary of grotesque ornament, as well as importing ideas from the North.

André Chastel’s narrative of the grotesque motif begins in France with Montaigne’s famous quote on his grotesque wall paintings<sup>110</sup> and proceeds to draw a picture from Montaigne to the production of local artisans, on to Fontainebleau and then brings it the reader back to Raphael. In essence, Chastel sees the dissemination of the grotesque from multiple facets and broadens the frames for reference beyond and Italo-centric model. He asserts that from the time grotesques reached Fontainebleau that there was a veritable race to create ever more fantastic designs:

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<sup>106</sup> Gruber, 202.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>110</sup> See this quote in Chapter 4, p. 165 in this dissertation.

Épisode capitale, mais vite dépassé: des rebondissements sensationnels interviennent à l'étranger dès 1530-1540 : à Fontainebleau d'abord, puis avec l'intervention décisive des graveurs flamands. Dès lors, tout au long du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, il y aura sur la base acquise une constante surenchère de propositions: les cartouches et les 'cuirs' du Rosso, les series gravées de Floris élèvent le jeu dans le register de l'extravagant et du fantastique."<sup>111</sup>

Thus Chastel identifies and continues to build a nexus of influences essential to the development of the French grotesque. In doing so, he also moves beyond the scholarship of Roger-Armand Weigert.<sup>112</sup> Weigert had proposed a single trajectory for the development of the motif in France. Though he did point out some early efflorescences such as the grotesques of Albi Cathedral (1510), he maintained that the primary agent was Primaticcio via Mantua.<sup>113</sup>

Chastel further identifies recurring features of grotesques, noting their hybridity and weightlessness, "la negation de l'espace et la fusion des espèces, l'*apesanteur* des formes et la prolifération insolente des *hybrides*."<sup>114</sup> He notes the vertical linearity of the compositions, "un monde vertical entièrement défini par le jeu graphique" without any real rules or consistency at first evident, and yet working from their own internal mechanisms of order, and notes the "formes mi-végétales, mi-animales, des figures 'sans nom'" a phrase that numerous followers have appropriated.<sup>115</sup>

His identification of the "jeu graphique" is crucial and alludes to the practices of visual play artists employed in their use of the motif. Within this context, Chastel returns to the notion

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<sup>111</sup> Chastel, André. *La grottesque*. Paris: Le Promeneur, 1988. P. 19 But note that Floris only really became actively engaged with grotesques in the mid-1540s, with enough time for Fontainebleau prints to influence him.

<sup>112</sup> Weigert, Roger-Armand. "L'art Decoratif en France: Les Grotteschi ou Grotesques, leur adaption and leur évolution" *L'Information Cuturelle Artistique*. no. 3, March- April 1956. 48-54.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 25. (italics are Chastel's)

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

of grotesques as fantastical entities, but is one of the few that addresses the innate sexuality of many examples of the motif, writing that they are

un produit pur de l'imaginaire où se condensent les fantaisies, d'une vitalité à la fois trouble et fuyante, nettement erotisée dans le détail. Le domaine des grotesques est donc assez exactement l'antithèse de celui de la représentation, dont les normes étaient définies par la vision 'perspective' de l'espace et la distinction, la caractérisation des types.

The sexuality of grotesques, and its relationship to the fantasy opened up by the grotesque is essential theme in the motif's recurring usage.

Chastel finds that grotesques work to undermine hegemonic modes of representation.<sup>116</sup> But one could argue that the strictures of perspectival space were already being challenged, such as in the form of Lippi, and that the rendering of space in the mode of the grotesque could perhaps be an ancillary development to the exploration of non-perspectival means of expression current in painting. His definition isn't that far from Vasari's as free and humorous pictures or fanciful devices. It cannot be ignored that in Italian descriptions of grotesques, the fantastical nature of grotesques, and their concomitant act to subvert pictorial conventions was a consistent theme in the literature. And yet, in practice, grotesques were enthusiastically used for elite and conservative audiences, and it is not as evident that grotesques were seen as being so subversive in the context of France itself. In practice, grotesques were disseminated by custom. Chastel finds that while Vasari's definitions hit all the high points "espace irréel, figures composites, le

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.



paradis des extravagances,” he omits the source, Vitruvius.<sup>117</sup> This suggests that Vasari was perhaps overlooking the negative aspects of the grotesque as it is described in Vitruvius’s treatise. But Chastel does not elaborate on Vasari’s omission, and does not go so far as to suggest why it occurred. However, Chastel does comment that use of the grotesque not only activated references to Rome, to poetic operations, and to old debates about the superiority of certain arts over others,

La peinture est un art d’illusion, puisqu’elle donne une sorte de présence à quelque chose qui n’existe pas, ce qui permet d’ailleurs de représenter les êtres en leur absence. Mais cet art s’apparente à la poésie dans le mesure où il permet de composer des êtres fictifs, et même des créatures ‘mi-homme, mi-cheval’ à son plaisir. C’est le centaure, en somme, qui prouve le statut élevé de la peinture. Cette remarque, plutôt naïve, n’est qu’une utilisation d’une maxime (dictum Horatii) répétée depuis XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle...”<sup>118</sup>

He goes on to identify a parallel development between adoption of figures in decorative schemes and manuscripts, and grotesques in the form of what he calls “rinceau habité”<sup>119</sup>; and this phenomenon, which he situates around 1500, occurs in art throughout Europe, though he singles out Jean Pucelle especially, for he “avait instauré un théâtre de marionnettes, le lieu de toute sorte de petites scènes humoristiques où il y avait du bouffon, grossier, licencieux, voire scatologique...”<sup>120</sup> After surveying the variety of elements in grotesques, he surmises that “la force de la grotesque tient à sa capacité de recueillir toutes les modalités imaginatives de

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 39-43.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 42.

l'ornement à l'intérieur d'une formule dont on répétait – pour s'en autoriser – l'origine romaine.”<sup>121</sup>

By exploring French prototypes such as those of Pucelle, Chastel furthermore navigated away from existing scholarship on French grotesques. Brigitte Wagner, writing in 1974 had identified a ‘problem’ with the idea of the French grotesque—that its origins were largely intertwined with the import of Italian images.<sup>122</sup> She focused especially on Du Cerceau, and concluded that his grotesques drew extensively from Italian prints. But Chastel sees these images as a result of European currents of thought, and does not problematize the Italian-French relationship. There is a much greater complexity to the origins of grotesques. While the values of their production are essential, the images and objects’ afterlives through reception and use form a large part of their meaning. Wagner did identify the simultaneous developments of Rosso and Du Cerceau in France, but one could argue that these were not the only variations.

Chastel examines the relationship between literature and grotesques, but in doing so, broadly deals with the respective output of France, Italy and Germany.<sup>123</sup> He points out the special role of the burlesque and searches for ways that this mode supported the development of the grotesque corpus. Without giving much to support his argument he asserts that *Macaronices libri XVII* by Teofilo Folengo (Venice, 1517) directly influenced Rabelais, and hence draws the burlesque back to France. He furthers his discussion of the evolution of the grotesque by positing that the arabesque is a direct outgrowth, albeit one less prone to fantasia. He paints a picture of a

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>122</sup> Wagner, Brigitte. “Zum Problem der 'französischen Groteske' in Vorlagen des 16. Jahrhunderts; das Groteskenbuch des J.A. (1550/62).” in *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Institutes der Universität Graz IX-X* (1974-75) 123-183.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 55-64.

newly standardized aesthetic, especially prevalent under Le Brun, writing “l’essentiel réforme tient à l’unification thématique de tout panneau de grotesques: un même programme – les saisons, les dieux, les arts...--doit relier tous les elements.”<sup>124</sup> In doing so, he discusses arabesques as if they were newly dominant, but contracts of the sixteenth century show that they were frequently desired for various projects. Like Weigert before him, Chastel sees a continuance of the grotesque tradition well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Chastel’s work, though profoundly important for the classification and clarification of the grotesque mode has certain limitations. He does not deal with anything beyond two-dimensional media, or with social or political contexts. He focuses instead on the formalistic development of a chronological determinacy akin to his predecessors, and in turn would go on to influence his followers. His work is also clearly stricken with a desire to insert France into the larger discourse of Renaissance art. This is profoundly important, but without great support to many of his points, the French contribution to this emerging European aesthetic remains vague. His work is constrained by adherence to the discourse of Neoplatonism in the Renaissance. He works to decipher the chimerical properties of his subject through this lens.

While Chastel routinely identified the importance of the school of Fontainebleau to the development of mannerism, the much larger role that the development of French tastes played in Europe and the 16<sup>th</sup>-century has yet to be fully investigated. Long seen as a late development of Italian aesthetics, French art of the period has never really been considered a generator of artistic ideas. The cosmopolitan nature of Fontainebleau in particular, with artists from both the north and the south of Europe, coupled with the grand ambitions of the monarch, created a climate in

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

which the political, social, and pedagogical power of objects and luxury goods were harnessed in a direct expression from the center outwards. However, there was art being produced in smaller, peripheral locations that established new techniques or vocabularies. But were these stories anomalous situations, or were most of these peripheral cases following modes set by the French court? Do we see a growing centralization of art practices in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or is it a continuation of developments in the previous century? What this study will attempt to show it is that the process that gets us to the centralized nature of production under the Sun King had already begun early on in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is not a linear progression. For grotesques specifically, this study will consider the motif outside of the progressive model, and will attempt to highlight the complex nexus contributing to the ubiquity of the image in both two and three-dimensional media.

### 3 Meanings and Manifestations

This chapter will explore what grotesques meant to both their viewers and their makers in France in the early modern era. The mere assumption that grotesques could have a meaning at all runs counter to much of the literature on ornament during the period. As I explored the ways that grotesques have been considered in literature in the preceding chapter, here I will begin to elucidate three themes that organize our understanding of how grotesques carried meaning in the specific context of France. The themes that I will explore further are Appropriation, Materiality, and Visual Play. These are ideas that I have found to be consistent across the majority of examples that I have researched. However, I do not believe that they are exhaustive. Essentially these themes provide a framework for research and comparison of the objects and images in question.

During the period concerned in this study, many of the operations taking place in the field of literature find corollaries in the visual arts; they in fact reinforce once another. Writers during this time often made use of visual art to exemplify aspects of literary practice. The search for an authentic French language evident in du Bellay's *Defense* is echoed in the distinctive ornamental programmes being developed at Fontainebleau. The uses of the antique past, references to current developments in Italy, the self-referentiality of material production, and rampant experimentation with forms are qualities inherent in both the art and the literature of the period. The grotesque motif underscores this development and one could perhaps say that not only does it serve the aesthetic needs of art in France, but perhaps the literary as well. The grotesque provides a malleable framework of interchangeable elements that can be improvised on with

infinite possibilities for combinations, and it offered a vocabulary for physical and spatial attributes such as the metamorphosing body or fictive architectural environments. In short, it spawned a unique aesthetic sensibility in French intellectual culture.

There is very little written directly about grotesque ornament in the two and a half centuries covered by this study. Save contracts, where grotesques were occasionally explicitly mentioned, there was no artistic theory that sought to deal with it as there was in Italy.<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, grotesque ornament is everywhere, and appears to have been as much a part of aesthetic considerations during the period that its inclusion can be acknowledged through customary practices. Moreover, just as there are few treatises that address grotesque decoration, so there are few texts that specifically condemn it.<sup>126</sup>

Grotesque ornament also served to incorporate and represent intellectual preoccupations during this period. In the mid-sixteenth century we see grotesques with finely observed insects, animals and flowers corresponding to a renewed sense of scientific observation. Over the course of the seventeenth century, dense, heroic figures were incorporated into gold ensembles, and outfitted with dark colours, reflecting the authoritarian tastes of the Bourbon monarchs, and in the eighteenth century, grotesques display a lightness and frivolity reflective of the Regency, and incorporate Asian elements displaying France's new global reach. In other words, though some aspects of grotesques change from decade to decade, in general, their authors, consciously or not, incorporate elements of the contemporary moment into their design. To understand grotesques in

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<sup>125</sup> Barocchi, Paola. *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*. Milano-Napoli: R. Ricciardi, 1971. Barocchi collected all Italian treatises that deal with 'Grotteschi' in Volume 3.

<sup>126</sup> Bédard, Jean-François, and Gilles-Marie Oppenord. *Decorative Games: Ornament, Rhetoric, and Noble Culture in the Work of Gilles-Marie Oppenord (1672-1742)*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011. p. 36-37.

any one period is to understand something about the tastes and preoccupations of their patrons and viewers.

### 3.1 The development of grotesque ornament in France

The earliest grotesques in France tended to translate the grotesques of Raphael's Vatican projects into architectural and sculptural spaces. They also responded to some of the more generic iterations of ancient Roman ornament popular from the mid-fifteenth century in Italy. In the south of France, at Avignon and Marseilles, Francesco Laurana designed ecclesiastical compositions in the 1470s that have strongly vertical, vegetal elements used in the form of engaged pilasters.<sup>127</sup> This possibly predates the discovery of the Domus Aurea, and may be a localized response to general types of antique ornament. Later in the sixteenth century, the cathedral of St. Sauveur at Aix was adorned with dense, vertical grotesques.

This production resulted in a profusion of grotesque stonework used especially as framing devices around doors and windows, such as at Orgon, in the Oratoire du Chemin de Beauregard (1516) and on the door of the chapelle de l'hôpital in Aix (1518). Gloton suggests that these developments were not influenced by Gaillon (Normandy) and ornaments found in the Loire Valley, but responded more to the regional development of Italian-style ornaments proffered by Laurana.<sup>128</sup> Of course, Laurana had worked for the counts of Provence, and this province was absorbed into the kingdom of France in 1481. If the motif had a regionally

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<sup>127</sup> Gloton, Jean-Jacques. *Renaissance et baroque à Aix-en-Provence: recherches sur la culture architecturale dans le Midi de la France de la fin du XVe au début du XVIIIe siècle*. Rome: École française de Rome, 1979. p. 15-33.

<sup>128</sup> Gloton, 40.

motivated development, it was quickly appropriated by the monarchy of France.<sup>129</sup> Nonetheless, the work of the sculptor Jean Guiramand, who is listed in the contracts for the cathedral in Aix (St. Sauveur) in 1508 suggests that the production of grotesque ornament was already an established practice of some French artists in the region by this early date.<sup>130</sup>

Between 1508 and 1510, at his chateau at Gaillon, Georges d'Amboise conceived of a decorative program of grotesque ornament that would be suited to the interior environment. (Fig. 10) This date make the Château of Gaillon's decoration contemporaneous with the grotesque ornaments in the Petrucci Palace and in Pinturicchio's Piccolomini library, both in Siena. The decorative program at Gaillon also predates that of Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's Cappella dei Priori (1511-1515) and Raphael's Vatican Loggia (1518-1519).

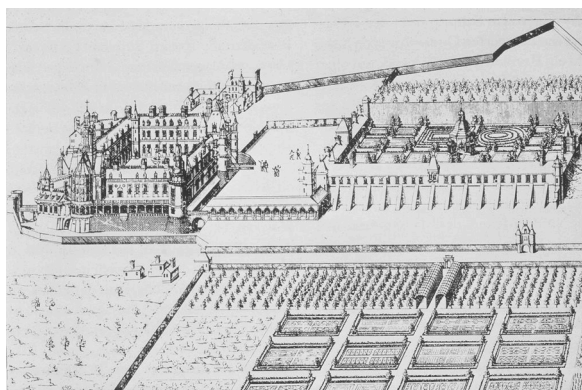


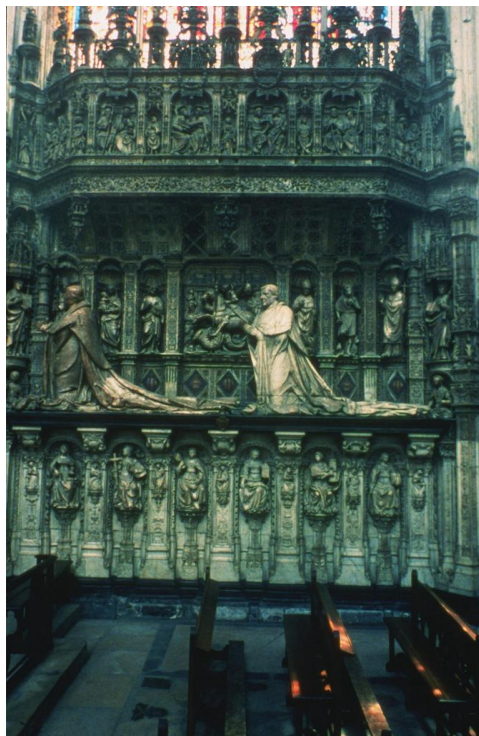
Fig. 10 Ducereau, Jacques A., *Chateau de Gaillon*, ink and wash, 51.5 x 74 cm, London, British Museum

<sup>129</sup> It is important to note that though the last count of Provence, René of Anjou, had originally ruled from Naples, his dynasty traced its lineage back to France. René spent the last ten years of his life in Provence. For the development of Laurana's work in the south of France see E. Mognetti : 'Italianisme(s) dans la sculpture avignonnaise de Francesco Laurana à Imbert Boachon', *Du gothique à la Renaissance: Architecture et décor en France (1470–1550)*, ed. Y. Esquieu (Aix-en-Provence, 2003), pp. 17–32. And Mognetti's 'Francesco Laurana, sculpteur du Roi René en Provence', *Le Roi René en son temps, 1382–1481* (exh. cat., Aix-en-Provence, Mus. Granet, 1981), pp. 133–83.

<sup>130</sup> For St. Sauveur, in addition to Gloton, see the more recent work of Christien Gallisot-Ortuno, "Aux sources de la Renaissance provençale: études des sibylles de la cathédrale Saint-Sauveur d'Aix en Provence" in Esquieu, 2003. p. 33-50.



Yves Bottineau-Fuchs has suggested that the French artists working at Gaillon such as Jérôme Pacherot and Michel Colombe used the grotesque prints of Zoan Andrea and Giovanni Pietro da Birago as models for their compositions.<sup>131</sup> He goes on to suggest how influential the grotesques of Gaillon were for the region, giving rise to façade ornaments on urban hôtels in Rouen, as well as on d'Amboise's tomb in Rouen's cathedral.<sup>132</sup> (Fig. 11)



*Fig. 11 Roullant Le Roux, Tombs of the cardinals of Amboise, 1515-1525*

D'Amboise further cultivated the style in the region through urban spectacles and triumphal entries. His use of the grotesque motif was meant to be a powerful indicator of his cultivated

<sup>131</sup> Bottineau –Fuchs, Yves. “Georges Ier d’Amboise et la Renaissance en Normandie” in Esquieu, p 91.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p. 89-104.

tastes, his strong position within France's ecclesiastical hierarchy, and hence ties to Rome, as well as direct display of his wealth.

### **3.2 The case of Anne of Brittany**

Other early adoptions of the grotesque motif can give insight into how well placed ornament could convey signs of political intention. A particularly good example of this is Anne of Brittany's commission for a tomb for her parents. In 1502, faced with the impending annexation of Brittany, the duchy's sovereign Anne, commissioned a magnificent tomb for her mother and father, Marguerite de Foix and François II. France had declared war on Brittany in 1488, leaving the young Anne, then only twelve years of age, in a weakened political state. She was persuaded to marry Charles VIII three years later, the terms of which compelled both Charles and Anne to forgo some of their rights over Brittany. She was obligated to marry his successor if he died before her, and she would only regain the duchy if no male heir were produced. In return, Charles gradually decommissioned his army in Brittany. The duchy had long been the object of a tug-of-war between England and France, a situation that had to some degree allowed the duchy's autonomy. However, with Charles and Anne's marriage, and with the Treaty of Étaples between England and France, Charles essentially procured Brittany for France and the duchy's independence was at a distinct end.<sup>133</sup>

In 1499, Anne indeed married Charles' successor, Louis XII. In doing so she was able to negotiate better terms for Brittany, by which she was able to "administer the duchy in her

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<sup>133</sup> Knecht, Robert. *The Rise and Fall of Renaissance France: 1483-1610*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. p. 34-40. The Treaty of Étaples, among other things, compelled England to recognize France's control of Brittany.

lifetime and draw its revenue.”<sup>134</sup> Their marriage contract also stipulated the retention of the control of the duchy for Anne’s descendants. But Anne’s circumstances rapidly deteriorated after she was only able to produce a female heir, Claude. The politicking for a betrothal to Claude threatened the stability of Brittany. In the meantime, Anne commissioned Girolamo da Fiesole, and later two French sculptors Jean Perreal and Michel Colombe to design and erect her parents’ tomb at St Pierre Cathedral in Nantes.<sup>135</sup> (Fig. 12 and 13)



Fig. 12 Jean Perreal and Michel Colombe, Tomb of François II and Marguerite de Foix, 1507, Carrara marble

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>135</sup> The authorship of the tomb is disputed. See Zerner, 39. Also Chastel, 127 and Paul Vitry. *Michel Colombe et la sculpture française de son temps*. Paris: Librairie centrale des Beaux-Arts, 1901.



*Fig. 13 Jean Perreal and Michel Colombe, Tomb of François II and Marguerite de Foix, 1507, Carrara marble, detail*

Each corner of the tomb is made prominent by one of the four Virtues, standing and holding a corresponding attribute. The tomb then proceeds in three different registers. The lowest is comprised of roundels featuring hooded figures in mourning rendered in black marble. The middle register sees a series of saints set within niches, and the top register consists of the effigies of the Duke and Duchess in repose. The space between each register is demarcated by thick black bands of marble that contrast neatly with the white marble figures. The visual quality is further enhanced by the contrast between the vertical figures at each corner of the tomb and within the niches, and the strong horizontal aspect imposed by the reclining figures of the duke and duchess and the heavy black slabs of marble between the registers. Delicate flourishes of grotesques frame the niches of the saints in the second register.

The strong contrasts between light and dark, coupled with the tension between horizontal and vertical aspects were not new in France; they were already present in Gothic tomb sculpture. However, the tomb presents an example of the early inclusion of grotesques in France, here used as elements within a larger scheme of political declaration. The use of grotesques is remarkably subtle. Carved in low relief in the interstices and pilasters between niches, they do not draw attention to themselves, especially in the midst of the drama evoked by the contrasting light and dark figures. They do however frame these elements, and are present not just at the surface level of the tomb but also within the recessing archivolt of the niches, as well as in terracotta coloured backgrounds for the figures of saints.

The grotesques of the Domus Aurea had only been discovered twenty years before, and it seems certain that Girolamo da Fiesole and his team were not quite yet confident in the grotesques' effects. And yet, they include them. On the pilasters of the middle register, they are comprised of various combinations of trophies, weapons and foliage, piled high and terminated by Corinthian capitals. The rest of the grotesques are predominately of a floral variety, and hence make them a natural extension of the Gothic floral grotesque, common before the founding of the Domus Aurea. It is the former that are most intriguing for they draw a direct line between this tomb and the decorations of the Domus Aurea, and were probably known through the various prints that had begun circulating around France by this time. The grotesques are of a figureless and relatively general type, but the delicate balance between the vertical elements can only suggest that their model lay ultimately in tunnels beneath the Domus Aurea.

Given the heady political times in which Anne commissioned this monument, is it possible to extract a larger political meaning for this decoration? The fifteenth century was not a

time of great political treatise writing in Brittany, but there are clues to the nature of Brittany's changing society and move for greater autonomy from both France and Britain. Michael Jones has noted a shift in the language dealing with notions of political authority, whereby the term *dominium* (lordship) gave way to the more prolific term of *majestas* (sovereignty) from the mid to late Middle Ages onwards.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore the fifteenth century saw expansion in both the size of the ducal administration and of the court. These institutions in turn founded much of their power on Roman inheritance. Jones writes for instance that, "the Breton dukes were prepared to claim imperial prerogatives and justify judgments in cases of *laesa majestatis* in full Romanist terms."<sup>137</sup> The hierarchy of Breton society was in the process of positioning and legitimating its seignorial rights by way of ancient precedent. At court, a parallel development was occurring, as its sheer size increased and by the time of Anne's rule, a true court, with the incumbent rules and pageantry had emerged.<sup>138</sup> These two phenomena combined however suggest that political propaganda would not have been limited as a display towards French territorial agendas, but also towards the burgeoning power of competing dukes within the court itself. Displays of political authority were meant to face the challenges from the nobility within the Breton hierarchy. Nonetheless, the share of power of these dukes was a visible and important part of Brittany's society, and their share in 'public authority' had to be carefully balanced and acknowledged. Jones suggests that the "state thus reinforced a distribution of political and economic power of great antiquity rather than conspicuous novelty." By the fifteenth century the dukes had

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<sup>136</sup> Jones, Michael. "The Late medieval state and social change: a view from the duchy of Brittany" in *Between France and England: Politics, Power, and Society in Late Medieval Brittany*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003. Section IX (117-144) p. 121.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 125.

increased the stake in power guaranteed by their traditional rights, and there was also a concomitant tradition of political display wherein “qu’ils avaient pris conscience de la nécessité d’exhiber leur richesse (et donc leur pouvoir et leur autorité) à travers les vêtements somptueux, les riches bijoux, les tombeaux ostentatoires...”<sup>139</sup> Anne then found herself within an environment where she had ducal courtiers vying for power within a system founded upon ancient precedent, and was simultaneously confronted with the political machinations of France. The commissioning of the tomb then would fit as both political display within the traditional Breton sense, but by including grotesques, there is also a movement to display something simultaneously traditional, by its very origins, and yet unique within political imagery. The books of hours that she commissioned also included grotesques in the various iterations of that project. These books of hours, completed by Jean Bourdichon between 1507-8, contain grotesques in images such as that of St Luc, in which the saint is again ensconced in a niche framed with grotesques, or in alternate edition of the book, a scene of David and Bathsheba is framed by a heavily decorated frame with grotesques, topped by an eastern arch of Hellenistic type. (Fig. 14)

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<sup>139</sup> Jones, Michael. “‘En son habit royal’: Le duc de Bretagne et son image vers la fin du moyen âge” in *Between France and England: Politics, Power, and Society in Late Medieval Brittany*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003. Section XI (253-278) p. 263.



*Fig. 14 Jean Bourdichon, Hours of Anne of Brittany—St Luc, 1507-1508*

As in the tomb of François II and Marguerite de Foix, these illuminations contrast and frame the sacred subjects with the antique grotesques. The images of both tomb and illumination are in one turn given more decoration, but are also given greater historical legitimacy. The grotesques give veracity to the scenes, by placing the figures within a setting of classical design. The saints are removed from the earthly world and are instead envisioned within an ancient context. Thus Anne maintains a quality of Breton tradition, but by using these grotesques, she



asserts her right of inheritance by historical truth. She negates the pompous display of the dukes, and very subtly crafts a message asserting her right as duchess of Brittany. Naturally this also held a message towards France, by giving a visual reminder of Brittany's ancestral rights of autonomy. What emerges with this example of the grotesque's use in Brittany is the motif's provocative power to connote antiquity. Here the grotesque serves as one political symbol within the midst of many. This aspect of appropriation continued to be a palpable element in the motif's attractiveness to patrons and designers. However, it was not until the second quarter of the sixteenth century that the motif's rhetorical properties were greatly expanded at the First School of Fontainebleau. But in these early years, the candelabrum style of grotesque was used largely to frame, ornament and evoke the past. As the form of the motif expanded so too did the appropriation.

### **3.3 Fontainebleau and its Reach**

It was at Fontainebleau that the use of the grotesque motif became fundamental to the making of art in France during the sixteenth century. The motif became a primary vehicle for decorative programmes in France, and its usage would span two centuries. The grand projects for the interiors of the chateau at Fontainebleau were begun as early as 1531-32.<sup>140</sup> Initiated by François Ier, the chateaux became a site for the development of a uniquely French idiom, where an international group of artists collaborated on projects that spilled from one medium to the next. Responding to European developments in decoration, the art of Fontainebleau is at once hermetic and worldly, reflecting the closed atmosphere of a court away from court and

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<sup>140</sup> Zerner (2003), 67.

comprised of artists whose first languages were unlikely to be French. Rosso Fiorentino arrived in 1530, followed shortly thereafter by Primaticcio. Together they enlisted a vast array of artists; from Italy, they brought Antonio Fantuzzi and Luca Penni, from the Low Countries, Léonard Thiry produced prints of Rosso's works, and Frenchmen such as Pierre Milan and René Boyvin adopted the Fontainebleau style at their workshop in Paris. The chateau was reputed to be François's favorite domicile and special attention was paid to creating elaborate interiors that not only reflected his admiration for the site but to overwhelm visiting dignitaries as well. The style that emerged was a vigorous re-thinking of contemporary European ornament, and full extension to the idea of the grotesque motif. The stucco work of the Galerie François Ier incorporated the new, heavy strapwork, reminiscent of dried leather. Putti and fruits were arrayed around panel paintings articulated as decorated cartouches within the fleshy and vegetal frames. (Fig. 8) This ornament projects fully off the wall, and sustains a three dimensional presence that pushed the notions of picture and object into a blurred field.

Though as noted elsewhere, the Galerie has undergone substantial changes since Rosso first proposed the project in the 1530s, the fresco and stucco arrangements give us a semblance of his intentions.<sup>141</sup> So what makes these creations grotesques? They share both elements and spatial concerns with the grotesques proffered by Raphael's workshop and elaborated in France, but further them with a new vocabulary. The Fontainebleau grotesques are comprised of

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<sup>141</sup> There is a vast literature on the Galerie François Ier. See especially Zerner (2003), 70-89; Panofsky, Dora, and Erwin Panofsky. *The Iconography of the Galerie François Ier at Fontainebleau*. Paris: Gazette des beaux-arts, 1958. Béguin, Sylvie, and André Malraux. *La Galerie François Ier au château de Fontainebleau*. Revue De L'art (Paris). 16-17. Paris: Flammarion, 1972. Béguin, Sylvie. *Rosso e Primaticcio al Castello di Fontainebleau*. Milano: F.lli Fabbri, 1965. Zorach, Rebecca. "The flower that falls before the fruit": the Galerie François Ier at Fontainebleau and Atys excastratus." *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance*. 20:1, (2000), p. 63-87.

twisting, manipulated bodies, intertwined within tight architectural framing, surrounded by fruits, putti, garlands, shells, urns and emblematic creatures. Like grotesques of the Domus Aurea they posit a fantastic world, a lens through which scalar relationships are radically distorted and where the space of the wall itself dissolves into architectural dissimulation. As in grotesque prints and frescoes, cartouches appear, but here Rosso filled them with mythological scenes that are hard to decipher and even harder to thread into a narrative whole. Their designer extended the relevance of the grotesque's materiality, using stucco, paint, and tesserae, weaving back and forth between two and three-dimensional form. Primaticcio took much of the same vocabulary and used it for the chambers of the Duchesse d'Estampes, also at Fontainebleau, but here explores more of the monochromatic possibilities for revealing the dramatic chiaroscuro effects of stuccowork. (Fig. 15)



*Fig. 15 Rosso and Primaticcio, Bedchamber of the Duchesse d'Estampes, Fontainebleau*

These designs were then engraved and disseminated across Europe through prints. In this two-dimensional format, their inheritance from grotesque prints of Italy at the end of the fifteenth century is discernible even more. In stark black and white, the elements of the grotesque motif read in dense, fantastic formations. Many of the prints produced of Rosso's works at Fontainebleau were made from preparatory drawings rather than from the finished frescoes. This means that they do not necessarily preserve the look of the original paintings, but this practice did allow for the printmakers some leeway in what they actually represented: cartouches are filled with landscapes comprised of rugged cliffs, or putti get into hijinks in the corners of the compositions.<sup>142</sup>

Zerner contends that the "filial connection between Italian grotesques and Rosso's work at Fontainebleau is dubious" and while he does allow that they share certain elements in common, he argues that grotesques did not have the spatial considerations that appear in Rosso's compositions.<sup>143</sup> He writes "Rosso's gallery is very different because it depends above all on the sense of volume and the suggestion of gravity" and yet if we go back to Vitruvius's definition of his monsters, gravity, or its negation are inherent in the making of grotesque images.<sup>144</sup> There is nothing barring artists from exploring this spatial aspect in the work, and ultimately Zerner concedes that "the borrowing of certain motifs proves that Rosso was interested in grotesques, and this may have suggested the cross contamination between the organic and the inanimate, between the figure and the support that is found in the Gallery."<sup>145</sup> The prints of Zoan Andrea for

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<sup>142</sup> Zerner notes that there were variations in the practices of the printmakers. See Zerner (2003), p. 133-139.

<sup>143</sup> Zerner (2003), 138.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

instance suggest heaviness and a density commensurate with the gravity of Rosso's work. (Fig. 16)

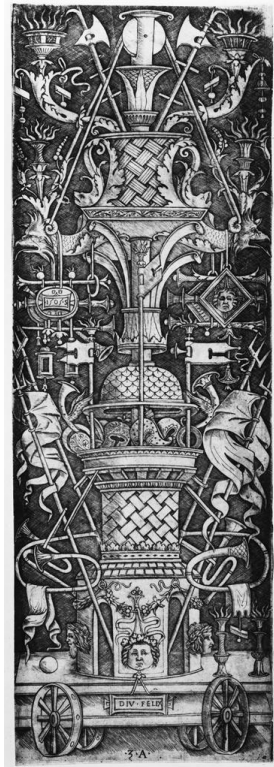


Fig. 16 Zoan Andrea, *Grotesque or Ornamental Panel with Trophies on a Chariot*, 1505, engraving, 394 x 134 mm, *The Illustrated Bartsch. Vol. 25, commentary, Early Italian Masters*

Sydney Freedberg also points out how Rosso was inspired by work from Raphael as well as Michelangelo.<sup>146</sup> Like artists of his generation, Rosso was actively synthesizing not only material from the ancients but from recent developments in art as well. Zerner neglects the fact that there was no single grotesque motif at this point, that there were examples carved in shallow relief and made to look light and ethereal, as well as densely packed prints depicting heavy urns and

<sup>146</sup> Freedberg, Sydney. "Rosso's style in France and its Italian context" in *Colloque international sur l'art de Fontainebleau*, and André Chastel. *Actes du Colloque international sur l'art de Fontainebleau: Fontainebleau et Paris, 18, 19, 20 octobre 1972*. Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975. p. 13-16.

chubby, weighty putti. Rosso's drawing of the *Allegory of the Death of Laura* is an example of how he uses the space and framing mechanisms of grotesque decoration to give depth and expressive content to a narrative scene. He employs contorting Michelangelesque figures, heavy fruits and an abundance of strapwork. (Fig. 17) His 1530 drawing for a tabernacle further demonstrates how he was considering how metamorphosing figures (here depicted as caryatids) could be used to frame and define a three dimensional object. Artists during this period did not work in one medium alone, and Rosso likewise would have thought across media. He would have considered the very different effects possible through stuccowork versus engraving. Therefore it is entirely reasonable to assert that he was designing very much with the grotesque motif and its infinite possibilities in mind.



Fig. 17 Rosso Fiorentino, *Allegory of the Death of Laura*

It became increasingly popular through the 1540s to publish the Fontainebleau grotesques as ornamental frames. Fantuzzi and Jacques Du Cerceau are notable for this activity, and by doing so, were able to create incredibly malleable images. Rebecca Zorach notes that by producing the frame devoid of a central narrative, they “could be used as designs for a wide variety of media—painted overmantels, mirrors, book frontispieces---and as spaces for drawing or pasting other images.”<sup>147</sup> This suggests the diffusion of the grotesque motif and how it came to be used in so many different contexts. Du Cerceau also published three monographs on grotesque ornament, the *Grotesques* (1550), *Petites Grotesques* (1550, 1552) and the *Livre des Grotesques*, the last of which he dedicated to Renée of Ferrara in 1566.<sup>148</sup> In these texts Du Cerceau defines elements relevant *à l’antique*, but as Margaret McGowan has pointed out, “one has to look hard to discover what had been such prominent motifs in ruined landscapes” suggesting that they “have all but disappeared within the playful, decorative web of design.”<sup>149</sup> In other words, by the mid sixteenth century, grotesques had been completely redefined and no longer were the two-dimensional images to which Zerner limits his analysis. They were employed to hypothesize ever more improbable structures and spatial relationships.

Developments at Fontainebleau spurred these innovations, and while Pirro Ligorio’s designs for grotesques indicate similar trajectories in Italy, and Cornelis Floris was creating his own grotesque idiom in Flanders, there was a distinctively French grotesque style that emerged from François’s reign: one that was robust, floral, with metamorphosing bodies, and peculiar

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<sup>147</sup> Zorach, Rebecca. *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. p. 145.

<sup>148</sup> Du Cerceau also published a separate volume on vases and arabesques.

<sup>149</sup> McGowan, Margaret M. *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. p. 159.

stage –like effects for the presentation of bodies and forms. It was also at Fontainebleau that Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau (1510-1584) copied decoration from the Galerie d’Ulysses, and widely disseminated these images of grotesques throughout France as well as Europe.<sup>150</sup> His work would be used as exemplars across media.<sup>151</sup> His grotesques had an airy, stage-like quality that was less concerned with issues of volume and tone, but rather of elegant line. (Fig. 18) Not only did he produce texts on grotesques, but also provided pattern-books for arabesques as well. He almost single-handedly made the decorative schemes of Fontainebleau accessible to a much wider audience.<sup>152</sup> His texts are crucial in tracing the development and elaboration of grotesques in France during the sixteenth century. Much as Rosso articulated the fertile, fleshy emphatic grotesque iconic of the period, Du Cerceau provided a more cerebral prototype, closely tied to the Vatican grotesques, and also distinctly autonomous from the dictates of the court.

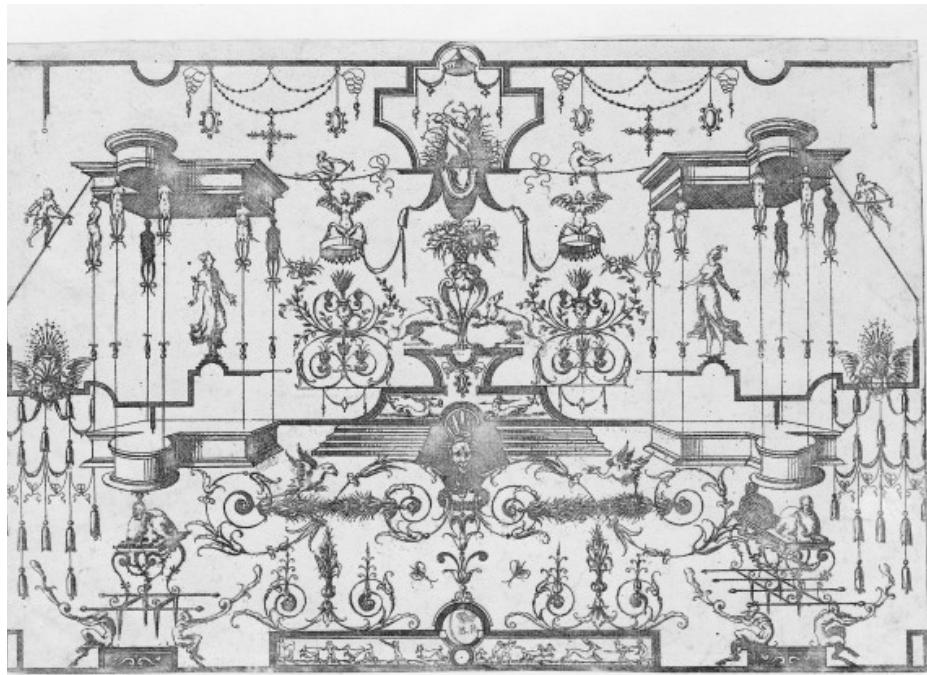
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<sup>150</sup> Béguin, Sylvie, Jean Guillaume, and Alain Roy. *La galerie d'Ulysse à Fontainebleau*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985.

<sup>151</sup> See for instance, Poke, Christopher. 2001. “Jacques Androuet I Ducerceau's ‘Petites Grotesques’ As a Source for Urbino Maiolica Decoration”. *The Burlington Magazine*. 143, no. 1179: 332-344.

<sup>152</sup> The most recent study of Du Cerceau’s output is Guillaume, Jean, Peter Fuhring, and Jacques Androuet du Cerceau. *Jacques Androuet du Cerceau*. Paris: Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine, 2010.





*Fig.18 Jacques Androuet I Du Cerceau, grotesque, fom the Grandes Grotesques, 1566*

Work such as that of Du Cerceau became increasingly important after the death of François I and upon the accession of his heir, Henri II, to the throne in 1547. Under Henri's reign the European character of artistic production in France diminished to some degree and more favor was placed on French artists. Philibert de L'Orme, for instance, benefitted from increased patronage. But grotesques continued to be used consistently, though the experimentation that marked the 1530s-1540s became less pronounced. Henri was less interested in Fontainebleau, but grotesques were employed across media, for instance on a suit of armor currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Fig. 19)



*Fig. 19 Armor of Henri II of France, 1555, Steel, embossed, blued, silvered, and gilt, Ht. overall 74 inches (187.96 cm), Wt. 53¼ lbs. (24.20 kg), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY*

Michelle Bimbenet-Privat has asked “Y a-t-il un style Henri II en orfvrerie?” to find that many of the objects that she investigates have a style “dans la tradition maniériste du style élaboré à Fontainebleau.”<sup>153</sup> She traces the influence of prints by artists working at the mid-century such as Etienne Delaune, who produced drawings and objects that combined both a fascination with the natural world and the realm of fantasy. Through the constant stream of prints, the decorative grotesque was used in interior decoration in chateaux across France as well. Frescoes at chateaux such as Villeneuve Lembron, created at mid-century, display both Raphaelesque grotesques in

<sup>153</sup> See Bimbenet-Privat’s article “Y a-t-il un style Henri II en orfvrerie?” in *Colloque Henri II et les arts*, Hervé Oursel, and Julia Fritsch. *Henri II et les arts: actes du colloque international, Ecole du Louvre et Musée national de la Renaissance-Ecouen*, 25, 26 et 27 septembre 1997. Paris: Ecole du Louvre, 2003. p. 209-218. See especially, 218.

the interior of the chateau as well as larger grotesques based on Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, composed against a white ground for use on the ceiling of the stables. (Fig. 20 and 21) While different artists perhaps created these, they clearly represent the range that grotesque ornament could represent, as well as the desire by patrons to demonstrate their allegiance and status in relation to the crown.<sup>154</sup>



Fig. 20 Villeneuve Lembron, frescoes inside the chateau

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<sup>154</sup> Enaud, Francois. "Peintures murales de la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle découvertes au château de Villeneuve-Lembron (Puy-de-Dôme)" in *Actes du Colloque international sur l'art de Fontainebleau: Fontainebleau et Paris, 18, 19, 20 octobre 1972*. Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975.



Fig. 21 Villeneuve Lembron, frescoes in the Stable

After the death of François, the regime change also affected those in his retinue. His mistress, the Duchesse d'Étampes ceded her property at Meudon to the Cardinal of Lorraine, Charles de Guise in 1552. Charles went about making the chateau over into a major center of literary and artistic patronage in Lorraine. At various times, Primaticcio, Domenico del Barbieri, and the poet Ronsard, were employed on projects for the Cardinal. Its vast gardens and grotto complete with antique statuary were commented on by a number of visitors. In his *Cosmographie universelle*, Thevet wrote "Meudon, recommandable pour les antiquitez que j'ay veües dedans, et pour sa crottesque, garnie de tant de statues et effigies antiques de marbres, que de bronze."<sup>155</sup> Perhaps this is also where Etienne de la Boetie came into contact with grotesques. He later added the motif to the façade of his home at Sarlat. (Fig. 22)

<sup>155</sup> Thevet, André. *La cosmographie universelle: illustrées de diverses figures des choses plus remarquables veues par l'Auteur et incogn. de nos Anciens et Modernes*. Paris: Pierre l'Huillier, 1575. I., f. 579v. See also McGowan (2000), 177.



Fig. 22 Façade of Etienne de la Boetie's house, Sarlat, France

Inspired by Meudon he composed his *Ad Musas, de antro Medono*, which he dedicated to Charles de Guise; Montaigne edited this in 1571.<sup>156</sup> François de Belleforest also described the grotto in his 1575 *Cosmographie*:

Vous aviez encor de ce mesme costé Meudon, plus cogneu et recommandé des singularitez...est aussi amoureux de tout ce qui est de rare, exquis, singulier, et gentil en la nature et imitation d'icelles: ce qu'il fait voir en cette Grottesque artificielle, et à demy naturelle de Meudon...<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> McGowan, 177-178.

<sup>157</sup> Quoted in McGowan, 179-180. See also Belleforest, François de. *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde... Vues de Provenc : Nice, Marseille, Aix, Avignon, Montpellier, Moissac, et Auch*. Paris: chez Michel Sonnuis, 1575.

Clearly, though Fontainebleau in its heyday had passed, its influence was keenly felt, and the grotesque was understood as both a decorative motif and aesthetic quality associated with the specific site of the grotto. It could represent mediation between man and nature, contemporary and antique culture, and also the superlative synthesis of such categories. Moreover, Thevet's assertion of the *crotesque* used to embellish statues of both marble and bronze demonstrates that the motif was no longer seen as being limited to painting. It should also be pointed out that Charles de Guise, like Anne of Brittany some seventy years before him, used the grotesque motif as part of a cultural programme demanding autonomy for his duchy, Lorraine. By establishing Meudon as a new Parnassus, the Cardinal aimed to demonstrate his duchy's own identity distinct from the encroaching French nation. However, like Anne before him, he witnessed the French crown eventually swallowing the region whole. The Fontainebleau style conceived under François I continued to dominate aesthetic concerns through the rest of the century, though under the last Valois, greater variety was given to an already pervasive mode of ornament. Its political potency still had much to offer both the monarchy and elite members of society.

When Henri IV came to power in 1589, he found that it was imperative given the dire political situation of the times to maintain a steadfast sense of continuity with the past. Fontainebleau enjoyed a renewed spate of activity under the first Bourbon monarch, where Amboise Dubois (1542-1614) was in charge of creating interior decorations, many of which included grotesque motifs.<sup>158</sup> Dubois was from Antwerp, and had been exposed to the style of Fontainebleau either in the Low Countries or in Paris, which had emerged as a major stop for

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<sup>158</sup> Droguet, Vincent. *Henri IV à Fontainebleau: un temps de splendeur: Château de Fontainebleau, 7 novembre 2010-28 février 2011*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2010.

northern European artists.<sup>159</sup> In the Galerie de Diane, Dubois painted grotesques as part of a vast system of mythological frescoes, some of which were recorded in a series of aquarelles by Charles Percier in 1794.<sup>160</sup> Later in the seventeenth century, grotesques were also painted for the chamber of Anne of Austria at Fontainebleau, evidence of which is preserved in watercolor studies by Eugène Delacroix.<sup>161</sup> Boris Lossky asserted that Dubois was very much inspired by the Galerie of Ulysses at Fontainebleau for the overall motif of his decorative scheme.<sup>162</sup> While his predecessors had used ornament to encapsulate power derived through sovereign authority and antique grandeur, Henri's motives seem more an attempt to harness legitimacy by associating his reign with that of the Valois. This is a position that would guide the use of grotesque imagery by the Bourbon line until the maturity of Louis XIV's reign. Henri IV, his successor Louis XIII, and the regent Anne of Austria found their rule challenged so emphatically that creating a direct visual link to the royal house of the past provided an overt measure of political symbolism that proclaimed Bourbon legitimacy. Challenges to royal authority resulted largely from the fall-out of the protracted religious civil wars in France, as well as the disastrous reign of the final Valois king, Henri III. This change in governance allows us to see how the grotesque motif retained a prominent place within artistic practice. It had become so redolent of royal authority; it simply could not be discarded.

Under Louis XIV, grotesque ornament did not disappear, but changed significantly. In the sixteenth century, appropriation was dominated by themes of acquisition and veneration of

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<sup>159</sup> Association Henri IV 1989, and Musée national du Château de Fontainebleau. *Les Arts au temps d'Henri IV: volumes des actes du colloque, Fontainebleau, 1992*. Pau: Association Henri IV 1989, 1992.

<sup>160</sup> Droguet, 63.

<sup>161</sup> This watercolor is in the collection of the chateau. See Droguet, 110-111.

<sup>162</sup> Lossky, Boris, Henry Flon, and Jean Baudry. *Fontainebleau: châteaux, forêts et paysages en Seine-et-Marne*. Paris: Le Temps, 1978. p. 151. See also Droguet, 67.

objects. Grotesques, like numerous other objects and images of antique origins, were bought and sold, or reproduced and displayed in settings that were designed to highlight their link with ancient Rome, and to bestow upon their owners a kinship with those semi-divine men of the past. What changes in the seventeenth century? For starters, France's territorial ambitions changed from that long campaign for dominance on the Italian peninsula, to one focused on the twin goals of isolating Spain and eastward expansion. As economic plans became more centralized and a mercantilist economy demanded raw goods, the appetite for antiquities and historical prestige took a lower priority. What's more, by Louis XIV's reign, it was deemed that France's visual culture must be premeditated, and based not on a mawkish copying of ancient models, but a completely new French visual idiom. France did not *own* ancient glory; it was its natural heir. Hence, the Academy under Le Brun attempted to completely define itself and France as the primary inheritors of classical tradition. It sought to extend Rome's DNA through a rigorous reassessment of classical principles in art and architecture. It then cast itself as the prime agent in the production and dissemination of classical ideals. Grotesques were not completely gotten rid of in this scheme, but they were re-imagined in a way that brought them into alignment with these stark rules. Those sixteenth century grotesques of Primaticcio and others were dismissed as gross and old-fashioned. It is not surprising that Fontainebleau and its collections were dissected, rearranged, and picked over in favor of the completeness of Versailles.

Within Versailles itself, Louis' visual schema recast the grotto/grotesque into a strictly ordered confection within the chateau's extensive grounds. The grotto of Thetis and its subsequent imaging portrayed a grotesque sensibility shorn of its subterranean qualities of action and recovery, and re-presented it as a finite quality of being. (Fig. 23) The grotto of Thetis is a



done deal, wholly visible, a solid stately revision – as if the Sun King hoped that his own glory was so great that it extended back through time, and refined the very essence of the antique. In this way, he presents a historical trajectory in which his reign serves as the apogee to history and culture’s progress. That is not to say that the present study aims to support the hackneyed portrayal of Louis as the ultimate egomaniac. On the contrary, he seemed ever aware of the state’s fragility, and through this visual rhetoric hoped to façade over the nation’s burgeoning difficulties.<sup>163</sup> It was tender scaffolding, which would ultimately be exposed and dismantled during the Revolution. But Louis’s program of glorification through revision would take hold, and served as a dominant theme throughout the remainder of the Bourbon monarchy.

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<sup>163</sup> Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel. *The Ancien Régime: A History of France, 1610-1774*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. p. 126-133.



*Fig. 23 Artist unknown, Louis XIV in front of the Grotto of Thetis, 1675, oil on canvas, 96 x 96 cm, Musée National du Château de Versailles et du Trianon*

There were nonetheless many examples of grotesque ornament in the years of Louis's long reign. Charles Le Brun frequently made use of them as borders and designs for paintings and tapestries (Fig. 24).<sup>164</sup>

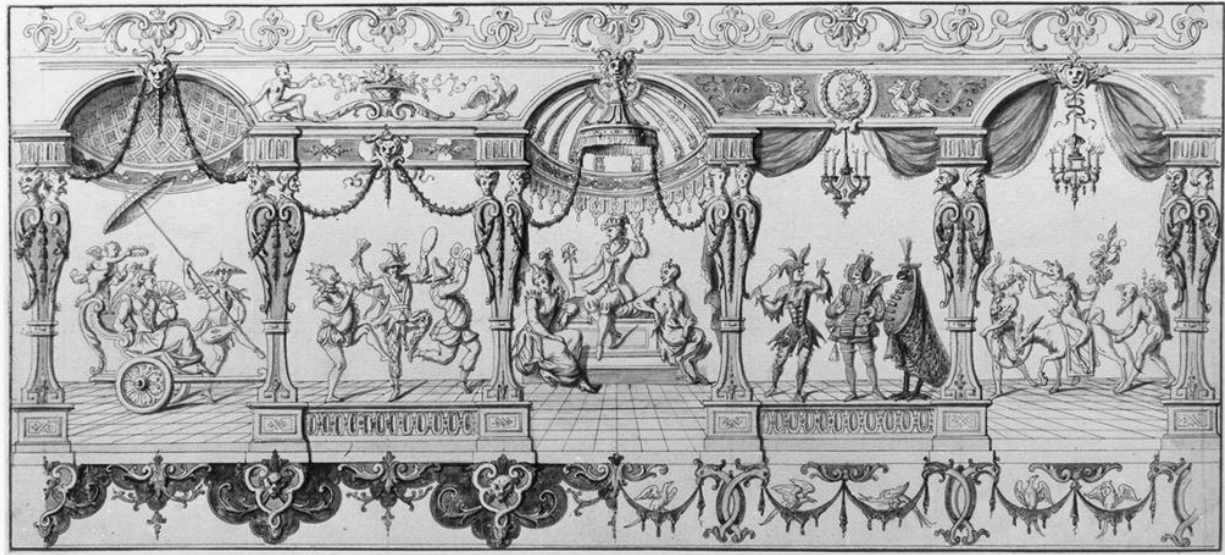
<sup>164</sup> There is yet no major study devoted solely to Le Brun's ornamental works. For an in-depth article, see Alain Merot, "Le Brun et la syntaxe de l'ornement" in Coquery, Emmanuel. *Rinceaux & figures: l'ornement en France au XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2005.



Fig. 24 Charles Le Brun, *Louis XIV Defeating the Turks in Hungary*, Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, 1678, fresco with stucco border

Jean Berain was a popular decorator during the period and his designs for grotesques were frequently integrated into tapestries. (Fig. 25) Borrowing the stage-like effects of Du Cerceau, Berain's style combined this influence with Asiatic references and more vivid colors. Berain's work was influential during the period and the designation "Berain Grotesques" was applied to tapestries and images that may or may not have been designed by him.<sup>165</sup> He re-popularized the motif and by the end of the seventeenth century, grotesques were again used on a wide variety of objects used for elite consumption.

<sup>165</sup> Parker, James, Alice M. Zrebick, Jessie McNab, Clare Le Corbeiller and Clare Vincent "French Decorative Arts during the Reign of Louis XIV 1654-1715" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 46, No. 4, French Decorative Arts during the Reign of Louis XIV 1654-1715 (Spring, 1989), pp. i+10-64. Kimball, Fiske. "Sources and Evolution of the Arabesque of Berain" *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Dec., 1941), pp. 307-316. La Gorce, Jérôme de. *Berain, dessinateur du Roi Soleil*. Paris: Herscher, 1986.



*Fig. 25 Jean Berain the Elder, Ornamental Design with Theatrical Figures in Five Compartments, late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century, graphite with pen and black ink and gray wash and watercolors on white paper, edged with black ink, 17.8 x 40 cm, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England*

Even before Louis's reign, early in the seventeenth century, as Henri IV and his minister the duc de Sully aimed to make Paris a modern capital, the urban homes of the aristocratic milieu began to adopt the vigorous grotesque mode of decoration similar to the gold-background ensembles sponsored by Anne of Austria, at the Palais Royal.<sup>166</sup> These aristocratic households continued the practice of magnificent interior display, and also began to build imposing entry portals for their urban mansions. This was a practice that continued well into Louis XIV's reign as courtiers sought to escape the stifling protocols at Versailles, and chose to maintain residences in Paris. It is in many of these houses that grotesque decoration continued to be used

<sup>166</sup> See Chapter 6.

prominently, and it was from the Parisian base of power that the motif regained its popularity after Louis's death.

Well before and during the Regency that followed (1715-1723), the heaviness of the twilight years of Louis's reign gave way to the lightness of rococo decoration and a new interest in the playful possibilities of grotesque design. Referring to the grotesques of Louis XIV's reign, Caylus comments on Claude Audran III (1658-1734), who was to be one of Watteau's teachers: "Il avait remis ces compositions en honneur et avait fait oublier le goût lourd et assommant de ces prédécesseurs dans ce talent."<sup>167</sup> This move away from the *goût lourd*, allowed Watteau in particular to carry on a renewed style of grotesque ornament, that corresponded with the invention of rococo forms. But the lightness of grotesque imagery continued further still to the advent of neoclassical design, when grotesques were resurrected from newly found paintings at Pompeii and Herculaneum, sites discovered in 1748 and 1709 respectively.

### 3.4 Appropriation

As seen with the example of Anne of Brittany and the Tomb of Francois II and Marguerite de Foix, political context could be intimated through the adoption of grotesque imagery. Grotesques appear in an era of increasing nationalism in which the status of culture and language hinged on a process of differentiation and defining of national identity. The approach to antiquity took on varying guises from aspiration to elegiac posturing. From the French perspective, the ruins of Rome posed a dilemma; to what degree was it possible to assimilate

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<sup>167</sup> Rosenberg, *Vies anciennes de Watteau*. Paris: Hermann, 1984. p. 60.

their forms without deferring all cultural authority to the Italian states? The course of French response during the sixteenth century proves one initially of deference and defense in Joachim du Bellay's *Deffense et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse* of 1549, and then to reaction in Henri Estienne's *Deux dialogues de langage françois italianizé et autrement deguizé, principalement entre les courtisans de ce temps* which appeared in 1578.<sup>168</sup> French theorists of the early modern era concerned themselves with creating a cultural link to Roman antiquity while simultaneously asserting French hegemony. The result was a curious balance in which the decay of Rome became a dominant theme, and France was its natural heir. Thomson points out du Bellay's warning to his compatriots of the "impermanence of fame if earned and expressed in monuments."<sup>169</sup> And yet, France's rulers continued to build on an elaborate scale over the course of the next two centuries. From Chambord to Versailles, one sees a defiance of the laws of time that the myriad ruins of Rome suggest. There is also a shift in the desire to possess Italy. Coveted by early Valois kings, by the end of the sixteenth century, the body of the Italian peninsula had become a sign of military humiliation and the source of court intriguers and conspiracy. The profoundly anti-Italian sentiment that grew through the course of the early seventeenth century would however never fully wash away the desire for antiquity's endowment, and later artists at the Sun-King's court attempted to assimilate the ethos of Rome into French Neoclassicism. In grotesques, there is a dual function: on the one hand, a memento mori, on the other, eternal triumph.

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<sup>168</sup> Thomson, David. *Renaissance Architecture: Critics, Patrons, Luxury*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993. p. 104-106.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 105.

François I attempted to appropriate antiquities in his quest to create a Classical French idiom. The form of the grotesque would have been a suitable motif for this exercise, because as a visual coda, it denoted subterranean exploration and buried objecthood. Knowledge of the ruins of the Domus Aurea would have given the grotesque a hybrid meaning of both Roman antiquity and the simultaneous recovery of that antiquity. Often far at a remove from the ruins of the Italian peninsula, and frequently unable to acquire the objects he coveted, or the artists he wanted to employ, François would have embraced the dual rhetorical properties of the grotesque's characteristic of appropriation. This desire to appropriate Roman antiquity continued through the sixteenth century, and there are varied references to both Rome's antiquity and to its glory. France was attempting to capture this splendor. In Henri II's triumphal entry into Paris, banners proclaim the kingdom, LUTETIA NOVA PANDORA, proclaiming Paris as a new Rome.<sup>170</sup> The numerous triumphal arches of the celebratory entries also extended the visual rhetoric of French culture, and its king, as the inheritors of the classical tradition. François also founded the Collège de France (1530) in order to propel the study of Greek and other humanist endeavors, following the advice of France's most prominent humanist, Guillaume Budé.

France however, also needed a distinctive relationship to classical culture. François and his successors were not simply content to inherit Roman culture. Their new culture was to be shaped into one in which France was at the crossroads of history. The grotesque provided a helpful motif, because it could be inserted into visual culture in so many different ways, many of which had specifically French prototypes. For instance, the grotesque could take over those places previously occupied by medieval iconography and France had led the continent in the

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<sup>170</sup> *The Entry of Henri II into Paris, 16 June 1549*. With an introduction and notes by I.D. McFarlane. Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1982.

production of iconic Romanesque and Gothic imagery. The grotesque could also be used for interior decorations such as in the borders of frescoes at Fontainebleau, echoing its prototypes in Nero's Domus Aurea, while simultaneously lending itself to Rosso and Primaticcio's agenda of glorifying the reign of François and his successors.

The grotesque also appeared in the new gardens of Renaissance France. Within such spaces, the grotesque exhibited the appropriative properties through its physical relationship to the manipulated landscape. The solidity of a garden grotto (the site of the grotesque) would stand prominently facing down the changing seasons, and juxtaposed against the ephemeral flora; remaining as an eternal archetype, a motif at the epicenter of creation, and at the confluence of natural forces. That the grotesque so often obscures or distorts nature is part of this relationship; acting as a rood screen, it obscures the universal. This is why it so easily mingles with the religiosity of a site such as the Vatican Loggia or in the small chapel at La Bastie d'Urfé. And surely, Louis XIV recognized its power when he had Le Nôtre orchestrate the grottoes at Versailles.

Sebastiano Serlio (1475- 1554) devoted his Third Book to François I. Written while in Venice in 1540, the text is an attempt to collect as many examples of ancient Roman architecture as possible, coalesced into print format and given illustrations that present the buildings not as ruins but as whole structures. After stating the purpose of the collection, then thanking the King for a kindness in the form of a previous monetary remuneration, Serlio proposes to complete such a project for the antiquities of France. He mentions ancient sites at Nîmes, Arles, Glanum (which he refers to as San Rémy), Vienne, and Fréjus. He then states that there are many others "but I will not discuss them at present because I shall save that for it pleases you to have me



come and see all these wonders in person.”<sup>171</sup> It has been noted elsewhere that Serlio did not think Italian examples of architecture more sophisticated than French; he routinely offered Italian and French variations of building schemes side by side. And this would have appealed to François, who appreciated the beauty of Italian art and architecture as much as he resolved to promote French art of the same caliber. They were just different. Serlio therefore offers an exchange, a compendium of antique ruins on the Italian peninsula, in order to produce for the king a volume likewise devoted to the antiquities of Gaul. And this can be understood to be the general approach to antiquity in France in the sixteenth century during the reign of François I: a curiosity about, and desire to collect antique specimens from ancient Rome, coupled with a keen interest in examples uniquely from France’s provinces.<sup>172</sup>

As well as offering an approach to those things *à l’antique*, Serlio offers didactic examples of how to incorporate such elements into contemporary building and design. One of the elements that he discusses repeatedly is the use of grotesque ornament. In this motif he sees both a signifier of ancient Roman antiquity, but also a place for the inventiveness of its author. He writes:

if you are to decorate ceilings which are vaulted in various styles, you should imitate the traces of the ancient Romans. They used to paint diverse compartments according to the subjects and also the types of vault, and they used to paint various strange things on them which are called grotesques (they work very well and are very commodious because of the freedom you have to paint what you like there) – for example mixed foliage, leafy branches, flowers,

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<sup>171</sup> Serlio, Sebastiano, Vaughan Hart, and Peter Hicks. *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

<sup>172</sup> Frédérique Lemerle documents much of this curiosity and proto-archaeology in France. See Lemerle, Frédérique. *La Renaissance et les antiquités de la Gaule: l’architecture gallo-romaine vue par les architectes, antiquaires et voyageurs des guerres d’Italie à la Fronde*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2005.

animals, birds, figures of any type whatsoever, but with the animals and with the foliage sometimes separated in different dispositions.<sup>173</sup>

Elsewhere, Serlio cites the magnificent grotesque work done at the Vatican loggias, the Villa Madama and the Medici Palace. He uses these examples to point out how mastery of this ornamentation led Raphael and Giovanni Udine to not only attain the greatness of the ancient painters, but also perhaps even surpassed them. On the Villa Madama, Serlio writes:

On this ceiling, and also on the walls, Giovanni da Udine, that rare, in fact unique craftsman of our times, strove to exhibit his genius both in his works of stucco and in his coloured grotesques of diverse animals and other bizarreries, such that because of all the beautifully conceived architecture, the decorations of stucco and painting, and the ancient statues which are there, this loggia could be described as extraordinarily beautiful.<sup>174</sup>

Serlio asserts that when set within the larger framework of a cohesive decorative scheme grotesques can lend themselves to the beautiful. This subtle manipulation of what is ‘bizarre’ with what is beautiful gets at the heart of how Serlio conceives of license and would have also provided practicing architects and artists with suggestions as to how to employ these figures. Throughout his text, Serlio is able to move beyond what Vitruvius dictates, if purely from having realized the variations in the archaeological record from what the ancient author codified as normative practice. Serlio attempts to bring the antique into the fold of contemporary practice that refuses to be limited by the prescriptions of the ancient author and to provide concrete examples of current artists that surpassed antique ideals. This would have been an especially

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<sup>173</sup> Serlio, Hart and Hicks. p. 379 Book IV 192r.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 279.

interesting notion in France, where François I particularly seemed to have realized that slavish adherence to ancient principles would not allow for the generation of a new vision of art.

Therefore he allowed his artists to experiment in order to create a definitive new aesthetic.

Raphael and Udine were key in this development. A large group of paintings, most of which were by Raphael, were sent to François as diplomatic gifts in 1518-21.<sup>175</sup> These works as well as others were popular subjects for reproductive prints in France. Raphael's *St. Michael* for instance, was recreated surrounded by a grotesque Fontainebleau-style frame.<sup>176</sup>

And prints depicting their work at the Vatican Loggia were also in circulation. Serlio again singles out Udine:

Now, amongst those who understand how to paint in this style there is Giovanni da Udine. He was, and still is, such a gifted imitator of antiquity in these things – indeed, an inventor in his own right – that in the perfection of the whole he has restored this style to us. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that in some respects he has surpassed antiquity.<sup>177</sup>

Serlio offers the prospect that through grotesque ornament artists may find ways of challenging the art of the ancients. This aspect of restoration was likewise crucial. Where François could not acquire illustrious contemporary artists or noteworthy ancient sculptures, he was content to acquire cast copies. Cast in bronze by Primaticcio, statues such as the Sleeping Ariadne and the Laocoon were placed in Fontainebleau's gardens.<sup>178</sup> Through the reproductive technology of casting, François was able to assert that Rome's glory could be restored in the royal environs of

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<sup>175</sup> Cox-Rearick, Janet, and Francis. *The Collection of Francis I: Royal Treasures*. Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1996. p. 72.

<sup>176</sup> See Fig. 219, in Cox-Rearick, 210.

<sup>177</sup> Serlio, Hart and Hicks, 379. see notes 334-6. see Coffin, D., 250-51, and Vasari, VIII.

<sup>178</sup> See Cox-Rearick, p. 354-356 and Bensoussan, Nicole. *Casting a Second Rome: Primaticcio's Bronze Copies and the Fontainebleau Project*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 2009.

France. Leonard Barkan notes this sense of failure that is galvanized into one of substitution, as seen through the transformative specter of Du Bellay's poetry where the ruins of Rome were transumed into a new form.<sup>179</sup> And this is born out through the collecting practices of François and the reproductive nature of his artists. Caroline Elam quotes François's art agent in Italy, Battista della Palla; he writes "Our need is not less for quantity, a great number of mediocre pieces, as long as they are antique, than for quality, for the most excellent."<sup>180</sup> Despite the sack of Rome, procuring antiquities, della Palla found, was quite difficult. So he resorted to finding pieces made in an antique style, or purchased contemporary works (mostly by Florentine artists).<sup>181</sup> And again, the casting of antiquities became an important aspect of François's collecting activities. The fact that it seems to have been so difficult to acquire antiquities might have accounted for Primaticcio's charge to "study and purchase antiquities, that molds be taken of the most celebrated pieces to produce copies in plaster and bronze" on his trip to Italy in 1540.<sup>182</sup> The making of copies after antique objects and images was however, quite common. Artists and intellectuals of the period frequently commissioned or exchanged copies of sketches or drawings made on site in Rome.<sup>183</sup> And the practice continued well into the seventeenth and

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<sup>179</sup> Barkan, Leonard. *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. p. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>180</sup> Elam, Caroline. 1993. "Art in the Service of Liberty: Battista Della Palla, Art Agent for Francis I". *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*. 5: 33-109. p. 50.

<sup>181</sup> Elam, 57. Elsewhere she suggests suggests that della Palla's legacy can be found in François's preference for Florentine works and notes that despite Aretino's attempts, François acquired few works by Titian, and had almost no works by the Venetian school. Cox-Rearick makes this point as well.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>183</sup> See especially, Joyce, Hetty. "Grasping at Shadows: Ancient Paintings in Renaissance and Baroque Rome" in *Art Bulletin*. June 1992, Vol. 74, n. 2.

eighteenth centuries. But the reproduction of images, especially in prints, could also gradually diminish the value of the original object.<sup>184</sup>

### 3.5 Materiality

Grotesques did not have the onus of being mimetic nor did they have to beg for artistic legitimacy vis-à-vis the ancients. Therefore they offered artists in the sixteenth century a formula for constructing evermore complex configurations that were not bound to any particular technique or medium. Though the Domus Aurea offered examples in paint, as we have seen, the motif was rapidly adopted across media. Artists could explore the boundaries between two and three-dimensional space with grotesques, which in turn allowed them to understand the inherent properties of their chosen medium. This physicality of grotesque decoration made it particularly relevant to the monarchy of France, whereby François initiated a programme of imagery that reinforced the notion of the king's physical prowess and potency as a necessary declaration of the monarch's fitness to rule. I will explore this notion further below in the section on Visual Play, but for now I will locate this quality of physical exuberance specifically within the range of materials, techniques, and knowledge required to commission and produce grotesque ornament.

From Vasari and Serlio we see that by the mid sixteenth century there were already specific ideas about what grotesque ornament was, and how it could be made. With their written descriptions, we also find that these practices were simply being recorded, and had already become part of customary practice among artists. Vasari described four methods for introducing

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<sup>184</sup> Zorach, 139, notes that criticism of the number of prints in circulation in the late sixteenth century exposes an anxiety that this could "cheapen artistic endeavor".

grotesque ornament into a scheme for wall decoration, where each variation involves using fresco or stucco techniques, either alone or in combination.<sup>185</sup> He describes these images as a “kind of free and humorous picture” where the ancients “fashioned monsters deformed by a freak of nature or by the whim and fancy of the workers.”<sup>186</sup> Though these images are according to Vasari “made outside of any rule” ultimately he concedes, “when touched with gold and modeled in stucco such works are gay and delightful to behold.”<sup>187</sup> He then considers the four methods, each of which he considers for the kind of contrast that they can provide.

One is to work in stucco alone: another to make only the ornaments of stucco and paint groups in the spaces thus formed and grotesques on the friezes: the third to make the figures partly in stucco, and partly painted in black and white so as to imitate cameos and other stones....Finally the last method is to work upon stucco with water colour, leaving the stucco itself for the lights, and shading the rest with various colours.<sup>188</sup>

Vasari then goes on to detail ancient precedents for such practices as well as to suggest the inclusion of landscape views and figures. He is keenly aware of the optical properties of viewing the different kinds of ornament here and further sets forward the notion of both imitation and play with three-dimensional forms such as cameos and stones. What he is indicating is a type of decoration that could be modeled into high relief, mimicking ornament that could be found in

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<sup>185</sup> Vasari, Giorgio, Louisa S. Maclehorse, and G. Baldwin Brown. *Vasari on Technique; Being the Introduction to the Three Arts of Design, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting, Prefixed to the Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. New York: Dover Publications, 1960. 246-247.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

ancient Rome as well.<sup>189</sup> Serlio also points out that paint and stucco both lend themselves to grotesque work:

They used to paint pieces of this material held by these figures, sometimes attached to other things, and they painted on this material whatever they fancied. Sometimes you can paint a simulated cameo figurine or something else of a similar material, some tempietti or other orders of buildings can be mixed with these, all of which can be painted on ceilings, either painted in colour, in stucco or monochrome – as the painter wishes – and they would be absolutely irreproachable since that was the custom of the worthy ancients, as the antiquities in Rome, Pozzuoli and Baia bear witness, where some remains of this sort can still be seen today.<sup>190</sup>

Again, neither of these texts is setting forward new ideas on how to create grotesque ornament, but rather seem to be summarizing practices that were already well underway and to give a historical veracity to the production of such designs. Both passages emphatically state that this type of motif allows for artistic freedom, and they both highlight the visual properties that grotesques had to have—a strong sense of contrast and manipulation of form where the artificial barrier between two and three-dimensional space could dissolve.

In France, though Serlio's work was certainly influential from the mid-century on, there was not as much consideration of grotesque ornament in written form as there was in Italy. However, contracts in France shed light on how grotesques were discussed and how customary modes of production allowed for an almost unspoken acknowledgment of the desire for such imagery. Interestingly, there is a disparity in media when it comes to how often grotesque ornament is specifically mentioned in contracts; painting contracts often demand it directly,

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<sup>189</sup> See Brown's notes on the text in Vasari, Maclehorse and Brown, p. 302.

<sup>190</sup> Serlio, Hart and Hicks. p. 379 Book IV 192r.

while in contracts for prints, architecture and sculpture, use of the term is more elusive. Nonetheless, enough examples survive to suggest that though grotesques were not always specifically contractually documented, through customary practices grotesques were still included in finalized projects.

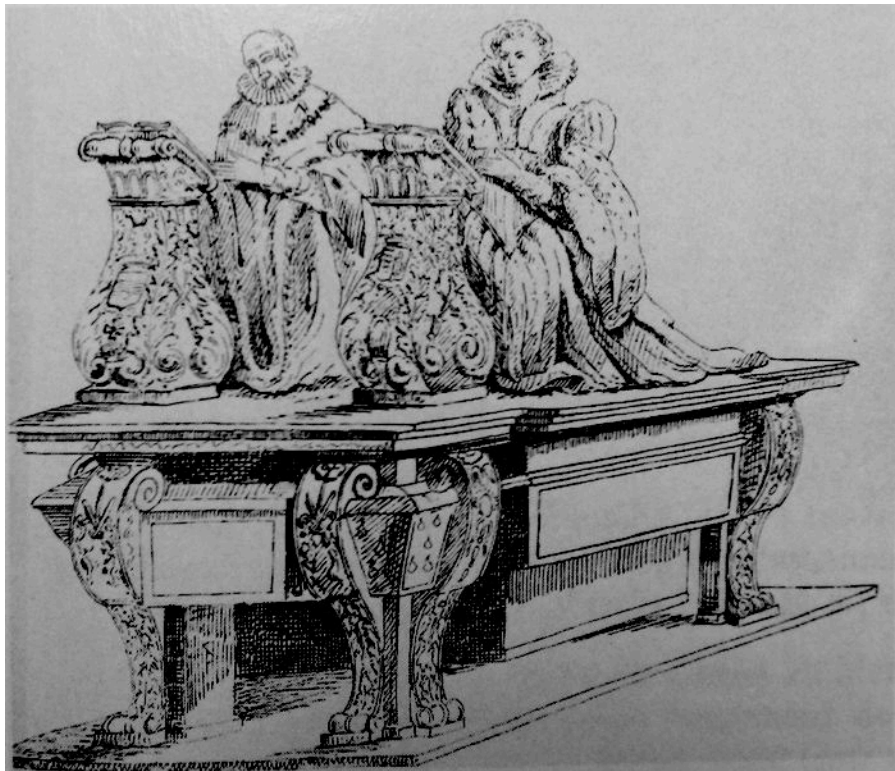
Two 1588 contracts for the tomb of René de Rochechouart, seigneur de Mortemart and his wife Jeanne de Saulx nowhere mention grotesques specifically, but individual elements usually found in grotesque design are stipulated, and a surviving drawing from Poitiers suggests that this type of ornament was used profusely on the tomb. (Fig. 26) What was important was to include symbols unique to the devices of the people for whom such monuments were constructed, and there is also a suggestion of the combinatory practice with which they should be used,

Est dit que le rellief et petite mollure plus proches d'icelles tables seront dorées d'or de feuille, comme aussi en semblable les testes de cherubin, les petites chiffres, les trophées et les branches de palme et laurier, qui seront dorées d'or de feuilles.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Contract dated February 6, 1588. Minutier central des notaires de Paris, and Catherine Grodecki. *Histoire de l'art au XVIe siècle, 1540-1600*. Paris: Archives nationales, 1985. Vol. II, 76, XI, \*65, fol. 96-96.





*Fig. 26 Jean Entrot?, Sketch of Tomb of René de Rouchechouart and Jeanne de Saulx, Church of the Cordeliers, Poitiers, 1588*

Elsewhere, such items are merely noted as “divers ornemens”, which was to have become shorthand for antique decorative motifs, particularly grotesques. This seems to have been the typical pattern for commissions in sculpture. Grotesques are rarely mentioned specifically, but both physical evidence and the litany of items specified show that they were in practice being employed frequently and perhaps out of custom. This may come out of conversations that took place before the sculpture itself was begun. One contract from 1579, discusses the use of “ornemens suivant le dessaing” suggesting that an agreement had been made beforehand by the

use of an illustrative drawing.<sup>192</sup> Inventories of deceased sculptors' workshops also highlight the various materials from which they could have drawn templates for grotesque decoration. In addition to volumes by Ambroise Paré and Serlio, the sculptor Barthélemy Prieur (1536-1611) owned numerous books that contained details of ornament as well as "quatre 'corps' de terre cuite réduits d'après l'antique."<sup>193</sup> Clearly he was as interested in using ancient prototypes to reproduce the human body, as he was in developing authentic systems of ornament. Having studied under Jean Bullant (1515-1578) who routinely used grotesque ornament in his work, one may surmise that Prieur sought to expand the vocabulary of classical ornament still further. Elsewhere, François Clouet (1510-1572) was commissioned to do paintings with grotesque ornament, "la thoise en carré de frize sur thaille neufve paincte de crotresque à destrampe de colle" though today he is mostly known for his figurative paintings and portraits. The grotesque was simply a part of an artist's playbook. In 1572, Jean Dutan was tasked with creating an ornamental façade on the rue des Petits Champs. In addition to figures of Mars, Venus and Cupid to be painted as if they were bronzes, Dutan was required to "paindre ung petit plancher de crotresse à detrempe".<sup>194</sup> Dutan seems to have been commissioned often for this kind of work. A contract from 1577 records a commission for two panels and a chimney painting for which Dutan was to make a chimney "en crotteste" and to complete paintings based on an agreement that had been previously made.<sup>195</sup> Considering surviving examples of painted chimneys that still exist from this period, Dutan's paintings would not have been a mere framing motif, but would

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<sup>192</sup> Contract dated September 9, 1579, for tomb of Charles d'O. See Grodecki, Vol. II, p. 90. XLII, \*13, fol. 54, 55.

<sup>193</sup> Inventory made upon death of Prieur's wife, Marguerite Dalencourt, November 8, 1583. See Grodecki, Vol. II, p. 129. For the inventory after prieur's death, October 28, 1611, see Lamy and Brière, *Bulletin de la Société du Protestantisme français*, 1949, p. 41-68. Op cit., n. 1, p. 129.

<sup>194</sup> Contract dated June 23, 1572. See Grodecki, Vol. II, p. 174. LIV, 187.

<sup>195</sup> Contract dated August, 4, 1577. Grodecki, op cit., p 192.

have been a rather ornate affair, most likely being modeled after examples from Fontainebleau. In a contract from 1559, Jacques Patin was commissioned to complete chapel paintings “en façon de crotisque” further indicating that the grotesque motif in France had become subsumed under a larger ‘style’ and that this style emanated out of the French court. Additionally, this style was so pervasive, that there was little effort made in contractual language to delimit it. These contracts also underscore the variant grotesques. On the one hand, contracts stipulating grotesques often do so in favour of the vertical, pilaster type---the candelabrum or the classical grotesque, while on the other, “en façon de crotisque” indicates acknowledgement of a more comprehensive scheme of ornamentation.

Grotesque materiality is further defined by its transference between materials. The strong contrast of elements in ornamental prints, a characteristic of the motif, had to be translated across materials. In doing so, artists were able to proclaim a mastery over a particular material. Working in wood for instance, an artist would have to take the grain into special consideration when sculpting, as well as the light absorbent properties of the wood. Dramatic spatial or figural effects could be reinforced through the use of resins to deepen tones or to reflect light where appropriate. Such were the techniques in the work of an artist like Hugues Sambin (1520-1601). Sambin is recorded as having been at Fontainebleau in 1544. He then continued the exaggerated Fontainebleau grotesque style across media, but especially in his furniture designs.<sup>196</sup> In its earliest manifestations in France, the grotesque exhibited a fundamental physical exuberance. In addition to the profusion of art that underscored the abundance of Francois’s

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<sup>196</sup> Sambin, Hugues, and Alain Erlande-Brandenburg. *Hugues Sambin: un créateur au XVIe siècle, vers 1520-1601*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001.

kingdom, the grotesque highlighted the physical prowess of the monarch's body.<sup>197</sup> The king's virile physique was mimicked in such forms as the architectural grotesque of the Grotte des Pins at Fontainebleau, where Atlas-like columnar figures seem to bear the weight of the structure that they adorn. (Fig. 27) The heavy strapwork of the School of Fontainebleau, while bounding the figures, also highlighted their taught muscles, and emphasized the aspect of the hunter's prowess by its natural reference to animal skin.

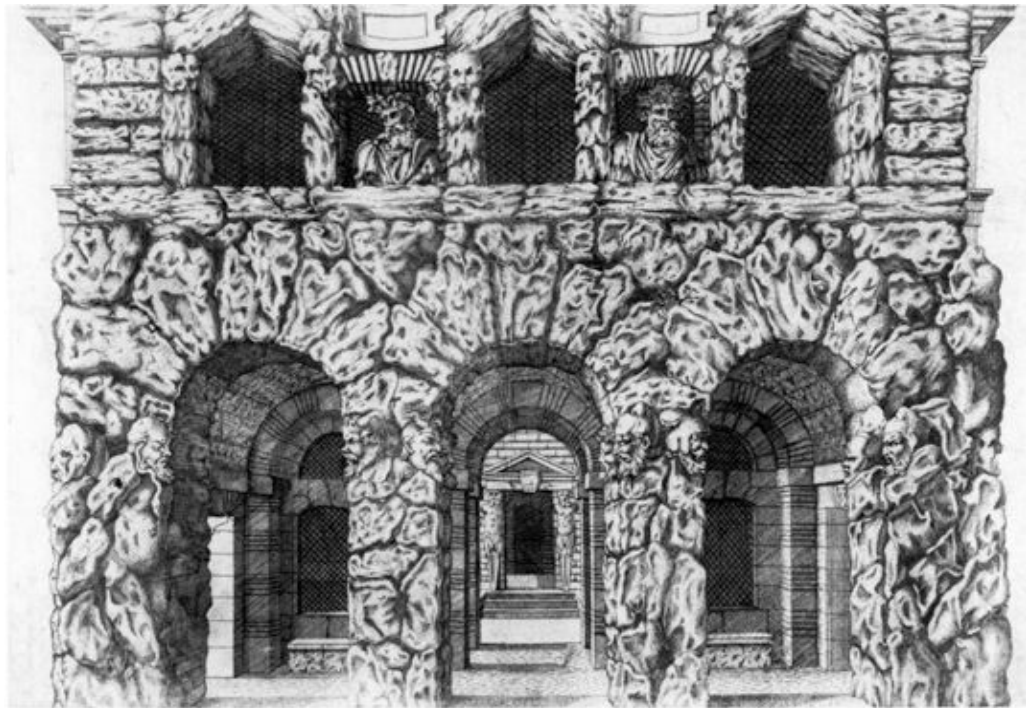


Fig. 27 Artist unknown, *Grotte des Pins, Fontainebleau, mid-sixteenth century, engraving*

Related to the appropriative element, the exploration of caves and grottoes has an attendant physical dimension. Wandering through Rome, sketching antiquities, Donato Bramante wrote of the Domus Aurea, “There’s not a heart so hard its not bewailing/ The spacious halls, the

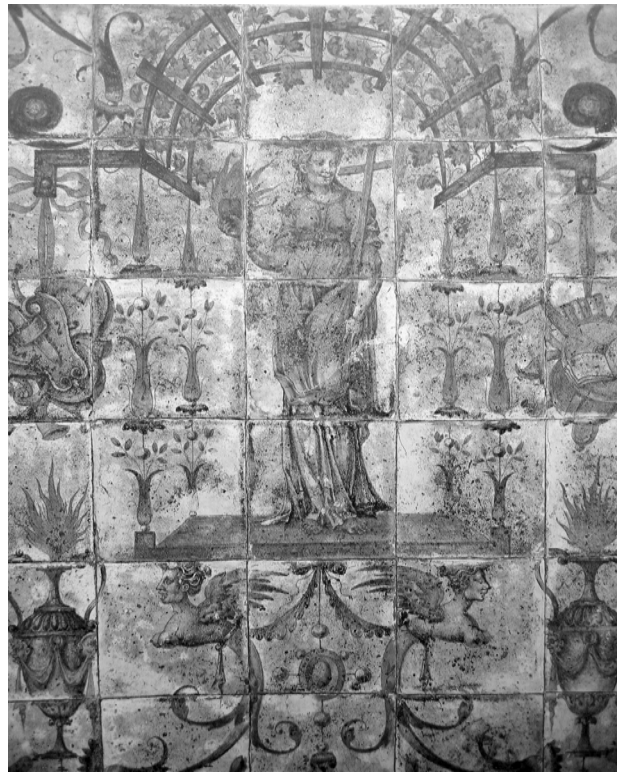
<sup>197</sup> See Zorach, Rebecca. *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: abundance and excess in the French Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

broken walls and bodies/ Of Rome, once so triumphantly prevailing”. And later he writes of the artists there, now “in every season/ We crawl along the dirt upon our bellies/ With bread, prosciutto, apples, and some vino/ Becoming more bizarre than the *grottesche*.”<sup>198</sup>

The female figures in grotesque ornamentation could have other meanings. There are many possibilities. However, it would seem that the beauty and abundance of the female form could support the representation of male power and virility (specifically the monarch’s prowess). By posing the female figure in ways similar to male forms, such as the columnar grotesques, we also see female bodies that are reminiscent of Michelangelo’s solid-bodied females. Moreover, as female bodies could take on multiple identities, as in Italy, the feminine form could also add an extra layer of meaning at the discretion of the patron and/or artist. A good example of this is the Virgin amid the grotesque in the tile work at La Bastie d’Urfé, where the central female body has been left intact, and endowed with the attributes of a Madonna with the fires of eternal love, or of the godhead. (Fig. 28) She in turn stands on a small dais held aloft by a pair of bare-breasted grotesques with wings. But these figures combine to show the overall effect of Claude d’Urfé’s family chapel where he hoped to depict the love of his marriage and his allegiance to the king.

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<sup>198</sup> Quoted in Rowland, Ingrid D. p. 106. See also n. 44 p. 290-291 for the text.



*Fig. 28 Majolica image of Madonna, Chapel at Bastie d'Urfé*

As mentioned above, the grotesque can also be linked to the work of Michelangelo. Through physically exuberant forms, we can also see the complimentary notion of artistic virtuosity. In attempting to match the supreme forms of Michelangelo, artists in Italy and France alike could display the intellect and understanding incumbent in the production of such complicated forms. It could also connote their own physical prowess, perhaps hinting (correctly or not) that they had seen ancient prototypes firsthand. As grotesques flourished particularly in the media of architecture and printmaking, they came also to signify the physicality of the production itself. The stone carving involved in inscribing the grotesque on chateaux could call direct attention both to the physical strength of artist and patron, and the Herculean efforts to acquire stone, the heights scaled and the distances bridged. This also elevated the status of the

stonemason, a trade that had a long tradition in France. The most prominent stonemason of course was Philibert de L'Orme, who explored some facets of the grotesque, particularly in his wall treatments. To depict the often-delicate details of a grotesque form necessitated a master's hand. French stonemasons, artists, and architects could excel with the representation of the grotesque largely because they had so long been involved in the traditions of Gothic ornamentation.

### 3.6 Visual Play

The aspect of the grotesque's playfulness, its ability to reflect and incorporate elements of the culture around its making is its most common and yet most elusive quality. Visual Play refers to the ways in which the motif creates connections between that which is depicted and to what it refers. This may take the form of a conversation between loci, or across temporal boundaries. In this regard, the visual play of the piece can incorporate aspects of appropriation and or materiality, but it may also allude to something beyond these categories. This is the area that we begin to see the license with which artists were emboldened during the period, as well as the development of the style unique to Fontainebleau, as Caroline Elam succinctly puts it in regard to a specific piece, the "combination of contorted figure style and erotic subject-matter that was to become dear to the French court."<sup>199</sup> As the grotesque moved from the margins of the medieval manuscript to the center of the Renaissance print, it carried with it the same sense of play and digression. Even though Rosso sent the grotesque back to the margins for the

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<sup>199</sup> Elam, 78.

Fontainebleau decorations, he and his successors continued to use it often as a cipher for the whole image. Gay putti and obvious allusions to erotica, give many of the paintings at Fontainebleau their true context, and it is certainly true that the viewer was meant to peruse these images, attempting to put them together.

Most recently, Christine Tauber has demonstrated the European wide development of Mannerism as an exercise in political rhetoric.<sup>200</sup> She uses François as a primary example of this, and refers to his ability to use artists to create a vision of a strong, cohesive state. More importantly for this study, she documents the ways that artists such as Rosso were employed at Fontainebleau to create images that through their variety, strangeness, and robustness, connoted the sovereign authority of the monarch.<sup>201</sup> This is a theme that has been taken up elsewhere and is a persistent element of art produced at Fontainebleau: the use of imagery to convey the ruler's authority.<sup>202</sup> Grotesques in particular allow for a high degree of novelty and can control viewing. They can contain a variety of symbols to display nuanced chains of reference, and have much in common with the production of emblems during the period.

Ultimately what is found at Fontainebleau is a complete rewriting of the rules. Perhaps emboldened by the prestige of their positions, the printmakers there forged a new vocabulary in which a variety of visual schemes came to fruition through their exhaustive experimentation. Given an unusual amount of access to the royal holdings at the chateau, the printmakers especially of the 1540s zealously attempted to document and monumentalize the artistic tastes of

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<sup>200</sup> Tauber, Christine. *Manierismus und Herrschaftspraxis: Die Kunst der Politick und die Kunstpolitik am Hof von François Ier*. Studien aus dem Warburg-Haus 10. Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2009.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 134-136.

<sup>202</sup> See especially Tauber (2009), Zorach (2005) and Zerner (2003).



their royal patron. Moreover, these artists went beyond reproduction and produced new and original images that complicated the technique's medium, pushing towards a broader conversation between light and dark, interior and exterior, narrative and symbolism. These images traded in both religious and mythological imagery, and excelled in depictions of both moral rectitude and libidinous acts. But they did not stop simply at dichotomy, but as a whole, the printmakers at Fontainebleau depended on ambiguity. This was because of the audience for these prints, a small elite of other artists and members of the court; these images were made to provoke and entertain, to be discussed and passed on. Their rough surfaces and shallowly engraved lines testify to this desire for speed and access, a veritable rush to press of aesthetic positions.

At Fontainebleau, grotesques took on a special prominence both as a rich signifier, as well as a rhetorical device. They are found on the margins of images, as inversions within cartouches, and as the underlying structure of an image. They are taken literally in their antique forms, as well as expanded and enlivened to accommodate the bounty of Fontainebleau as a new center. Through these myriad prints, grotesque designs found a French vernacular, and were quickly disseminated through the provinces. They informed artistic practices in a variety of media, as the mannered style of sixteenth century Fontainebleau became the dominant mode in France during this period. Moreover Christopher Wren attested France's leadership in the development of this ornament, in a letter from Paris in 1665. He writes, "I have purchas'd a great

deal of Taille-douce, that I might give our Countrymen Examples of Ornaments and Grotesks, in which the Italians themselves confess the French to excel.”<sup>203</sup>

The medium of the engraving is relevant to the visual play. The School of Fontainebleau prints were shallowly engraved, and left often with varying gradations of rough marks in the final image. We can imagine that they were made quickly, and then passed around from one member of the elite to another. With the common knowledge of the classics and medieval stories, these prints would have been read in a variety of ways, perhaps while its audience was gathered in groups, discussing their subject matter. There were narrative cycles to decipher and symbols to decode. The playful reading of grotesque images would have continued into the seventeenth century, though through slightly altered aesthetics.

Later in the seventeenth century, the grotesque merged with the burlesque, where we find images such as Callot’s depictions of the *Commedia dell’arte*. St. Simon describes a scene from Marly that has grotesque overtones:

I had just arrived and was already seated when I saw at the back a great deal of muslin—pleated, long, light, and flying—surmounted by a real stag’s antlers on a bizarre coiffure, so tall that it got caught in a chandelier. There we were, astonished at such a strange disguise, asking one another urgently, ‘Who can it be?’, telling one another whoever it was, he must be awfully sure of his forehead to decorate it thus, when the mask turned and showed the face of M. de Luxembourg.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Soo, Lydia M. *Wren’s “Tracts” on Architecture and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 105.

<sup>204</sup> Quoted in Rosasco, Betsy. “Masquerade and Enigma at the Court of Louis XIV” in *Art Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 2, (Summer, 1989) p. 144-149. See esp. p. 144. see also n. 1 (148)

Apparently the crowd watching roared with laughter because the stag's horns were part of a visual joke alluding to Monsieur de Luxembourg as a cuckold. Additionally the joke was devised by Monsieur le Prince, brother of the King, and he is also implicated in the grotesque here, because he is glorified through his wit (albeit at the expense of ridiculing another). The grotesque has moved into the performative realm, and hence expanded its material possibilities. This can be seen especially in the numerous theatrical costumes that Jean Berain designed for the court. These costumes were images made of combined elements used to depict the overall affect of a particular trade or role in society. The person is literally wearing a grotesque parody. (Fig. 29).



*Fig. 29 Jean I Bérain, designs for architects' costumes, 1700.*

During the seventeenth century though, the same freedom of the grotesque's development in other media seems to have been muted. The increasing authoritarianism of the monarchy put it in jeopardy. Early in the century, the visual schemes of the Counter-Reformation worked to have displaced the grotesque, though perhaps it continued, albeit underground in popular pamphlets. The establishment of the Academy effectively codified the art of the kingdom, and any artist that wanted to continue working would have had to conform to the taste of the court, and hence to the taste of much of the art-buying public. Early in his reign, Louis XIV seems to have had an appetite for some level of visual play, perhaps even for grotesquerie, but his increasing religiosity near the end of his life put an even tighter strain on art production. Later prints of the grotto at Versailles seem shallow and lifeless, and lack much of the rocky countenance of similar prints a hundred years before. The emphasis on reason effectively quashed much of the appetite for the grotesque, and the increased interests in authentic Vitruvianism would have cast the grotesque as unnatural. It is perhaps at this time that the grotesque is conflated with the monstrous, or the horrific. With the Wars of Religion, and its horrifying cycles of propaganda still in living memory, perhaps the grotesque took on these unintended meanings.

An artist, Serlio thought, needed to employ a certain level of judgement when using the grotesque. He writes:

you need great discretion and fine judgments in these compartments so as not to put two friezes of the same sort next to each other – next to a frond you should put a scroll or a grouping, then a grottesca of figures, then animals next to a frond and so on, varying them so as not to confuse the eye. And if these things which I am talking about are painted in monochrome with deep shading and highlights, with their own backgrounds, they will be much more highly praised by the

intelligent viewer than if they had been coloured, since coloured things are required for vaulted ceilings decorated with grotesques.<sup>205</sup>

So the grotesque also became a format by which an artist may indicate his sense of decorum, or even his virtuosity. And sites within France that contained highly prized decorative schemes such as Serlio's Grand Ferrara at Fontainebleau were routinely imitated.<sup>206</sup> Thus artists used the grotesque motif to display their ability, but also to construct series of reference points, such as the Grand Ferrara through which they connected their work to circles of elite consumption.

At the Villa Madama, Serlio notes that Raphael had Guilio Romano "paint on that façade an enormous Polyphemus surrounded by satyrs."<sup>207</sup> The satyr became one of the most ubiquitous elements of the grotesque in sixteenth century France, and this continued well into the eighteenth century. They appear in all of the case studies that I present here, and can be found on most post-candelabrum type grotesques. This is important because they herald parodic and sexual aspects to grotesques. Many Fontainebleau prints contain images of satyrs, both male and female engaged in various sexual acts, and they could be found on a variety of media. Their inclusion moreover closely ties grotesque ornament with the burlesque, and later on this becomes more pronounced in the eighteenth century as part of the *goût moderne*.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Serlio, 381, 193r.

<sup>206</sup> Dinsmoor, William Bell. "The Literary Remains of Sebastiano Serlio" in *Art Bulletin* Vol. 24, no. 1, (1942), pp. 55-91 and *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Jun., 1942), pp. 115-154.

<sup>207</sup> Serlio, 381, 193r.

<sup>208</sup> Bédard, Jean-François, and Gilles-Marie Oppenord. *Decorative Games: Ornament, Rhetoric, and Noble Culture in the Work of Gilles-Marie Oppenord (1672-1742)*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011. p. 30-31.

#### **4 Juste de Juste, Grotesques and the Ornamental Body**

This chapter will explore the work of a little known printmaker named Juste de Juste who produced etched images at Fontainebleau in France in 1543. It will relate how these images are grotesques, and in doing so, will extend the possibilities for what grotesques could mean in the mid sixteenth century in France. Juste de Juste used these images as a place to assert his authorial self, and these prints also provide a lens on the nascent scientific mind-set in early modern France. These prints present key features of the grotesque motif—a sense of structural instability, fantastic structural components such as the plant stalks in the place of columns, the use of pictures within the image, and assorted figures who may or may not be in the process of metamorphosis. The work of Juste de Juste and the world of ideas that he encountered at Fontainebleau also offers the chance to explore in more detail the nature of art patronage under François I.

During the tenure of his reign (1515-1547) François ruled over an often itinerant court, and he routinely organized military campaigns into northern Italy. Though these excursions were ultimately fruitless, even resulting in the king being taken as a hostage at one point, François nevertheless retained a strong desire for the artistic culture of the Italian peninsula. What he wanted specifically was to lure Italy's greatest artists to France. In this regard, he did in fact succeed in getting Leonardo da Vinci, but not Michelangelo. Under François, a vast collection of antiquities, casts of antiquities and modern art was organized. He hired Rosso Fiorentino to oversee the production of artworks at Fontainebleau, and later

Primaticcio was sent to Italy to cast antiquities and to acquire more objects for the king's collection.

But it was Michelangelo who was the elusive prize. The artist's influence in Italy was profound, as it was in France. His ability to create powerful, superhuman figures, and to thwart the constrictive rigors of High Renaissance classicism inspired many artists to challenge the boundaries of representation as well as production. Though he never made it France, his artistic skill cast a long shadow over artists working at Fontainebleau.

Benvenuto Cellini did make it to France (twice), although his second stay was short, just five years before he left under dubious circumstances. A skilled sculptor and goldsmith, his subject matter was influential at both Fontainebleau and Paris, and his work has a direct link to that of *Juste de Juste*, which will be examined below. Cellini also provided an example of how an artist fashioned his role at the court, and his biography details the reciprocity found between himself and the king. Though Cellini's station as court artist is clear, François had a dependency on his artists to create and disseminate his image.

In modern scholarship the notion of grotesques usually involves some amalgamation of ideas about the subaltern, the subterranean, and the subversive, in and of itself, positing a difference to accepted concepts, such as beauty and has served art historically as a diversion within the canon. And it's not coincidental that these definitions of the grotesque arose during the 1960s concurrent with much of the scholarship on Mannerism, while art history was coming to terms with the dismantling of traditional structures such as beauty, classicism, and linear narratives of progressive artistic development—in short, the canon. Derived from the discovery of grotesque paintings in what was thought to be an ancient Roman grotto, the term grotesque

moreover came to denote a site, such as when Brad Epps writes, “The grotesque does in fact recall the excrescences of a cave, the superfluous, if subterranean, surgings of the natural world. At the same time it is tied to artifice and adornment or, even more, to a counterfeiting and outrageous reworking of nature.”<sup>209</sup> In the sixteenth century, grotesques were found across media but were activated primarily through their use in elite circles, for they served as a mediating force between their culture and that of the antique. They also acted in such a way for man’s interactions and observations of natural phenomena. Epps recalls the cave, and the grotesque motif defined by the landscape of ruins, but the motif could also encapsulate investigations of nature and man’s roll within its confines.

France already had a strong material culture of luxurious objects and spaces in stone and wood, that of the Late Gothic. There was a great symbiosis between ornament and structure. And grotesques, once imported, began to take up much of the role of Gothic ornament. Artists working in France clearly began to experiment with reconciling Gothic and antique forms, serving for instance as decoration in Chartres Cathedral. Artists employed grotesques as frames and in turn framed them. The motif was given a larger role, particularly during the years of Francois Ier’s patronage of the First School of Fontainebleau, as this European collective of artists began to manipulate the formal characteristics of grotesques. We can begin to see the license with which these artists began to use the motif. They recognized that grotesques could be both ornament and structural logic, and this study will even go so far as to assert that they were less interested in the difference. What was unusual about Francois as a patron is that he seemed

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<sup>209</sup> Epps, Brad. “Grotesque Identities: Writing, Death, and the Space of the Subject (Between Michel de Montaigne and Reinaldo Arenas)” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Identities. (Spring, 1995), pp. 38-55. P. 42.



to allow his artists a relative freedom to explore his collections<sup>210</sup>, and to explore through their own work. All of the work at Fontainebleau is a celebration of Francois, but it is also a cacophony of experimentation born through competition and collaboration.

French art of the period is the visual exemplum of an artistic crossroads: imported artistic movements from the North (Netherlands and Germany) and the South (Italy) mingled with strong traditions of its own. These artists found themselves emboldened by a broad set of references, with which they were privileged and had the royal prerogative to experiment. In particular, the Italian artists that heeded Francois's call to Fontainebleau were given an unusual freedom, range of projects and riches to compensate for their labor. As David Franklin has noted, Rosso Fiorentino's output is representative of the diversity of work at Fontainebleau:

his presence at the court also altered his production, as he was called upon to design an even wider variety of items, on every scale, from court spectacles to tableware, horse trappings to vestments, and many other kinds of object with which he had not been concerned in Italy, including sculpture.<sup>211</sup>

In short French Renaissance artists, working collaboratively across media, developed a pastiche, producing images and objects that combined sources, contingent upon one another, that through their materiality could present shifting categories of meaning to their audiences. This was the invention of a culture, the meeting of a demand that emanated from the monarch for a unique visual language within continental Europe.

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<sup>210</sup> Cox-Rearick, p. 87.

<sup>211</sup> Franklin, David. *Rosso in Italy: the Italian career of Rosso Fiorentino*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. p. 266.

The prints that exist from this cultural output almost universally display the characteristic extension of the human form that came to dominate artistic representation in the sixteenth century, and is synonymous with what is called “Mannerist”. Of these printmakers, Juste de Juste remains one of the most elusive. His limited output of 17 etchings consists of 12 solitary figures and five prints composed of groups, all of which most probably date to 1543,<sup>212</sup> and they all clearly show the influence of Michelangelo and the ethos of Mannerism. Juste was most likely born around 1505 in or near Tours, and died there in 1559. He came from a prominent family of Florentine sculptors (the Giusti) who had been invited to France as early as Charles VIII’s reign. The Giusti brothers Antonio and Giovanni were responsible for a number of projects, the most prominent of which was the royal tomb of Louis XII and Anne de Bretagne from 1515-31, notable not only for its arched canopy and gisants, but for its use of grotesques in a very classical mode for decoration. Juste is mentioned in records from Fontainebleau as an assistant to Rosso, but there is no mention of his activities beyond this.

Juste de Juste’s prints have been described as “existential”,<sup>213</sup> and his figures as “acrobats”<sup>214</sup> and they have whetted the appetites of art historians searching for an aesthetic link between Renaissance and modern, and cited for anticipating the works of artists as disparate as Schiele and Matisse. (Fig. 30) The prints consist either of groups of five or six men fantastically suspended in air on top of one another in patterned formations, or they are of sole figures curiously isolated within narrowly framed spaces. In both sets, the male figures are pictured

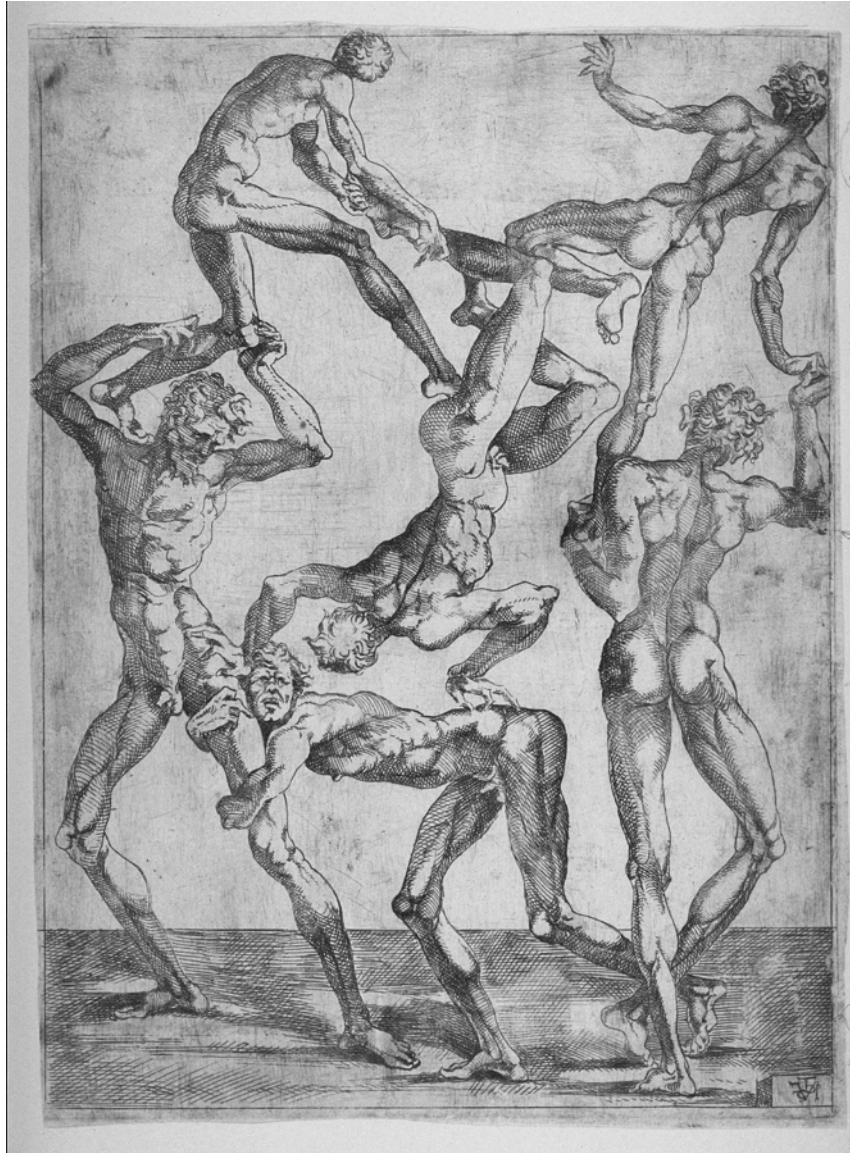
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<sup>212</sup> Zerner, Henri. *École de Fontainebleau: Gravures*. Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1969. see entry for Juste de Juste.

<sup>213</sup> Zerner (2003), p. 132.

<sup>214</sup> Drost, Wolfgang. ‘Der Tanz’ von Henri Matisse und ‘Die Pyramide der Akrobaten’ von Juste de Juste: eine Hypothese. Tübingen: Francke, 2003.

within an empty, stage-like setting. Juste's prints present us with the challenge of excavating the personal experience, a response to an emerging visual culture, through his idiosyncratic mode of production and expression. We can see his direct reaction to other artists at court, and to the larger specter of artistic experimentation in mid 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe.



*Fig. 30 Juste de Juste, French, ca. 1505–ca. 1559, Pyramid of Six Men, ca. 1543, Etching, Membership Purchase Fund, Collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 87.020.003*

#### 4.1 The Signature and the Self

On its most superficial level, the answer to the “what is it?” has proved controversial, but Juste’s prints of grouped men seem to represent his signature. Based on the ways that he manipulated his signatory mark in the bottom corners of each image, he was emphasizing certain aspects of that signing within the composition of the figures themselves. This practice was commensurate with the long tradition of Gothic lettering that often included the human figure contorted to fit the shape of a corresponding letter and suggests furthermore the continuing hold that Gothic imagery had, and is yet more evidence that the aesthetic implications of the Gothic and Renaissance were not mutually exclusive in the sixteenth century.<sup>215</sup> In the nineteenth century, Bernard Fillon discovered documentation for a Jean Viset, an engraver and artist who worked on images in leather, who was working at Fontainebleau. Based on his research, some scholars argued that the prints by Juste de Juste were in fact, by Jean Viset. Viset was the brother in law of Noël Garnier, a noted Parisian printmaker, and while he was present at some point at Fontainebleau, there simply is not enough evidence to suggest that Viset was the actual author of the etchings. Fillon argued that the signature panel in the images displays a V-I-S-E-T. (Fig. 31)

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<sup>215</sup> See especially Kavalier, Ethan Matt. 2000. “Renaissance Gothic in the Netherlands: The Uses of Ornament”. *Art Bulletin*. 82, no. 2: 226-251. Sankovitch, Anne-Marie. 1998. “Structure/Ornament and the Modern Figuration of Architecture”. *Art Bulletin*. 80, no. 4: 687-717.



*Fig. 31 Juste de Juste, detail, signature*

At this time, there was an emerging distinction between I and J, and U and V, but like many artists of the period, Juste was attempting to utilize the Latinate forms of the letters as found in ancient inscriptions. Moreover, Viset is listed as an engraver, and while the markings on the plate are likely intentional, they do not present one with the steady hand of a practiced etcher.

Garnier's prints are contemporary with Juste's, and though they share a common element of using the body in lettering, the styles between the two are vastly different, and clearly show a great disparity in their author's influences. (Fig. 32)



*Fig. 32 Noël Garnier, alphabet, 1543*

If the artist of the print series was indeed Viset, we could expect greater similarity between the two.

There is a distinctive correlation between the way that the artist signs his name each time and the way that he composes his figures. They tend to follow the lines, shapes and contours of etched name—as if he is varying the name. While the V (U) is often ambiguous, the I (J) is always emphatic and evidence that this is Juste is further underscored by the I's prominent position on the right side of the print, which would have been the left side of the etched surface, and hence Juste would have been writing his name from left to right and axiomatically placing the first letter of his name at its beginning. So consciously or unconsciously he is writing his name and giving prominence of course to the first letter. As an artist at court he certainly would not have wanted to make this image illegible either. There is a clear line that he is drawing between his own artistic creation while simultaneously depicting the work of his heroes such as Rosso and Michelangelo to whom he alludes in Plate 5 for instance, from which Juste quotes figures from the Medici Chapel. Like a delicate embroidery, Juste traces the curves of the joints of letters in the composition of his figures. In the signature panel he adds a greater weight to the letters where he means to inscribe a denser line, and in the figures above then creates a dramatic joint or form at the corresponding section. Though the name itself is always the same letters I-U-S-T-E, in each plate he varies the line weights of the signature to correspond to the transposed form above. This allows Juste to vary and experiment with the form of a human figure. He also is clearly drawing from aspects of Gothic lettering in which letters of prominent words were often personified or decorated in an elaborate manner. This continued well into the sixteenth century and can be seen in the work of Noël Garnier. As the modes of reproducing text began to change

rapidly in the fifteenth century, by the sixteenth century a variety of forms had been developed with which artists and printmakers alike could experiment in developing a vast corpus of styles and variations on Latin orthography. Commenting on the use of decorative initializing in Lemaire's *Temples des Vertus*, Adrien Armstrong suggests that this aspect "reinforces the text's own references to writing"<sup>216</sup> and Juste's marking of the copper plate is likewise simultaneously form as well as reference to that form -- the signatory mark. In Lemaire's text, those initials go on to form a complex interplay between letters and grotesques and putti.<sup>217</sup> It is interesting that this is happening within the context of the book/manuscript, one of the main sites of the medieval grotesque and is indicative of the fact that this conversation between what we call medieval and what we designate as classical were constantly being intermeshed into a complex play of forms precisely because artists and printers recognized the rhetorical strength of images/texts presented in this combinatory way. The divisive parameters of medieval versus classical designations were not as pervasive as perhaps thought; image-makers used them in tandem. The evidence for this is found in the sheer volume of books with engraved images, and also in the experimentation with new layouts for text on the page.<sup>218</sup> Armstrong further elaborates overlapping of medieval and antique metaphorical systems in regards to Bouchet's ornate allegorical poem *Le Labyrinthe de Fortune*, which highlights the fact that these experiments were not purely formal exercises, but also considered content as well.<sup>219</sup> These texts conveyed meanings not only through *what* was written but *how* the type and image were joined and made

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<sup>216</sup> Armstrong, Adrian. *Technique and Technology: Script, Print, and Poetics in France, 1470-1550*. Oxford modern languages and literature monographs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. p. 131.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Conley, Tom. *The Graphic Unconscious in Early Modern French Writing*. Cambridge studies in French. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

<sup>219</sup> *Le Labyrinthe de Fortune* appeared in 1522.

expressive. These works became vehicles for the poet's identity, and just as we see the poet's persona develop in relation to printing, so can we see a concomitant movement in art. At a time when printmaking as a medium was challenging authorship<sup>220</sup> Juste's work is illustrative of the growing importance of the authority of the signature.<sup>221</sup>

Based on the ways that he manipulated his signatory mark in the bottom corners of each image, he was emphasizing certain aspects of that signing within the composition of the figures themselves. This aspect of the grouped images as signature also corresponds to the revelation of the self in the sixteenth century, in terms of specific identity but also generic considerations of anatomy. There is a clear line that he is drawing between his own artistic creation and the work of his important artistic references such as Rosso.

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<sup>220</sup> See Chapter 3 in this dissertation.

<sup>221</sup> There is much literature on the value of the artist's signature and uses of script. For Italian examples, see especially Rubin, Patricia. "Signposts of Invention: Artists' Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art." *Art History*. 29.4 (2006): 563-599. Goffen, Rona. "Signatures inscribing identity in Italian Renaissance Art." *Viator*. 32 (2001): 303-370. Matthew, Louisa C. "The Painter's Presence: Signatures in Venetian Renaissance Pictures." *Art Bulletin*. 80.4 (1998): 616-648. For northern examples, see Cuttler, Charles D. "Holbein's Inscriptions." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. 24.2 (1993): 369-382. Adams, Ann Jensen. "Rembrandt (fecit): the italic signature and the commodification of artistic identity" in Gaetgens, Thomas W. *Künstlerischer Austausch = Artistic Exchange: Akten Des Xxviii. Internationalen Kongresses Für Kunstgeschichte, Berlin, 15-20. Juli 1992*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993.. For examples in France particularly, see Enaud, François. "Les fresques de Simone Martini a Avignon et leurs restaurations" in Bellosi, Luciano. *Simone Martini: Atti Del Convegno : Siena, 27, 28, 29 Marzo 1985*. Firenze: Centro Di, 1988. and Comer, Christopher D. "A Note on the Late Sixteenth-Century School of Lorraine: Three Drawings by Médard Chuppin." *Master Drawings*. 22.3 (1984): 298-303.



## 4.2 Under the Influence

Juste de Juste's prints were like those of many of his colleagues, meant to circulate amongst a few peers, other artists, some notables, and members of the court. These works were free to operate through a rarified code of literary and visual cues based on imported and evolving notions of masculinity, nature, and physical transformation. This limited circulation is born out by the formal characteristics of the shallow etching itself. Art historians have considered the printmakers of the School of Fontainebleau weak technicians, however I believe that the quality of the etching was intentional. These prints intentionally mimic the quality of the sketched or painted artifact grotesque, giving a sense of the antique to the relatively new medium of etching. As Stephen Campbell has pointed out, the acts of imitation and transmission themselves were undergoing change in the sixteenth century, and Juste's prints serve as further evidence of this assertion.

Juste's pyramids consist of groupings of decidedly male bodies. And yet they are depicted as contorted and extended, set within a non-descript space. The etching itself is shallow and scratched. The formal components of the human body coupled with the rough style of the etching result in a simultaneous SCARRING of the plate and bodies and set his work apart from that of his peers. It belies his experimentation but it also suggests the strong influence of sculptural practice both from within his familial background and perhaps from his own trade within the court. His bodies are wildly three-dimensional, as he exaggerates the contrast of light and dark in these images, carving into the plate as if to reveal the interior recesses of the body. The chest cavities of his figures appear ragged and open, as if he were dissecting not only the body but also chiaroscuro as a method. (Fig. 33) This violation of the normative depiction of the

classicized, Renaissance body ultimately represents the extension of man and transformation into another form. But it also expresses his deference to anatomical drawing, as well as to Rosso's late works in which his figures of Christ often display a similar tortured open chest. (Fig. 34)



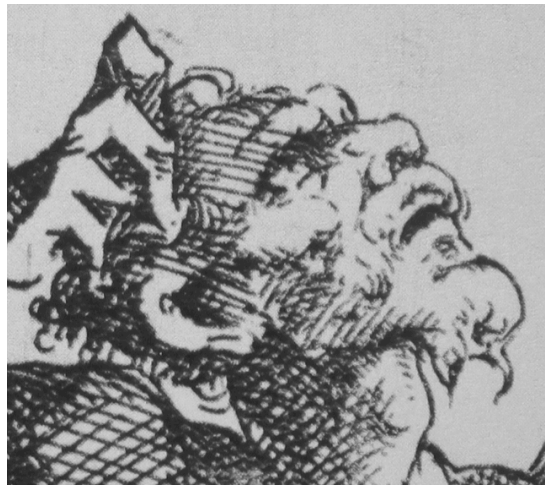
*Fig. 33 Juste de Juste, detail, chest cavity*



Fig. 34 Fantuzzi ? after Rosso, *Deposition*, 1540s, engraving

The relationship to grotesques is most immediately found in the very faces of his men-- satyr-like figures are suggested by their broad noses, furrowed brows and scruffy facial hair, and the figures have the sprightly step of these hybrid creatures. (Fig. 35) Moreover, the satyr appeared very specifically in the *volta gialla* of the Domus Aurea and was a prominent feature of other circulating prints that depicted grotesques. Satyrs were routinely employed to denote a rampant sexuality, and artists at Fontainebleau regularly used them as shorthand to suggest both

hetero- and homosexual couplings. This sexuality further brims with the aspect of potential transformation, from male to female or into yet another hybrid form, as seen again in many grotesques of the period, and many of the images produced at Fontainebleau also resonate with the new movements in poetry and literature of the period.



*Fig. 35 Juste de Juste, detail, satyr-like heads*

This aspect also allows consideration of a direct reference for the work-- Cellini's drawing for a Satyr, completed while Cellini was working at Fontainebleau in 1543, the year of Juste's output. (Fig. 36) Cellini designed a pair of satyrs to flank the Porte Doree at Fontainebleau, though they were never completed. There are, however, later casts though it is generally agreed that they look much more like satyrs than Cellini's sketch suggests, and he himself describes in his autobiography the aesthetic that he hoped for: "although I say 'satyrs', these figures had nothing of the satyr in them except for their little horns and their goatish heads: all the rest of the figure was of human form."<sup>222</sup> (Fig. 37) This corresponds to Juste's figures, as they lack the horns but display the facial features associated with the satyr. Moreover they have a resemblance to satyr figures that recur through French Renaissance prints where the bodies of the satyr are used to form shapes or angles within a composition and are especially prominent as elements in grotesques. Cellini's satyr also has a physical resemblance to Juste's depictions of solitary figures, in the use of shallow space and blocks for props. (Fig. 38) Juste's do not seem to have the functionality suggested by the rigidity of Cellini's satyr, yet it does appear that the Satyr served as model for the variations that Juste creates.

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<sup>222</sup> Cellini, Benvenuto, Julia Conaway Bondanella, and Peter E. Bondanella. *My Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. p.42.



*Fig. 36 Cellini, Satyr, 1543, drawing*



*Fig. 37 Cellini, Satyr, bronze statue (cast after 1543)*



*Fig. 38 Juste de Juste, Solitary Figure*

There could also be a reference here to the satyr, Marsyas. There are three things that indicate that this may be a source for Juste. In the story of Marsyas, after losing his contest with Apollo, he is flayed alive. The act of flaying and dissection have a curious relationship, and Juste's images clearly show an indication of visually dissecting the body, but this representation could also be a subtle allusion to the flaying. Jonathan Sawday points out that the flayed figure of Marsyas appears in the anatomical texts of Estienne, Vesalius, and Valverde, the last image of which was likely inspired by Michelangelo's St. Bartholomew in his Last Judgement.<sup>223</sup> Artists during the period regarded Marsyas as something of a hero for having had the skill and talent to challenge a god (in that famed musical contest) only to lose solely through the deception of the

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<sup>223</sup> Sawday, Jonathan. *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. London: Routledge, 1995. p. 185-88.



Muses. But of course, there is the recognition of limits and a need for modesty (maybe here expressed as decorum). Could the smallness of the genitalia then be a reference to this figure, and his hubris? Or is Juste, in an elegiac mode, proffering his figure's likeness to his dead mentor, Rosso Fiorentino. There is a Hellenistic *Marsyas* from the Borghese collection that is now in the Louvre. (Fig. 39) It is not clear if the statue made its way to Paris until the eighteenth or nineteenth century, but if it was around Rome in the sixteenth century, Rosso and Cellini definitely knew of it and in turn would have informed Juste. The figure is about to be flayed and is represented hanging from a tree. His body is extended as his arms are held over his head.



*Fig. 39. Marsyas, Louvre*

Juste pushes the mode of representation further and brings another dimension into his work: the emission of sound and how this reinforces the notion of instability in the work. Some of the satyrs mouths are gaping open as they stare into the composition of figures that weigh over and above them, emitting a huff or sigh, as the weight of the pyramids are heard, but the lightness of touch defies this. (Fig. 35) Juste de Juste captures a tension in the work, the satyrs move and appear nearly weightless with thin bodies, toes and feet just barely resting in their places, but the expressions on visible faces, and the open mouths measure an arduous choreography. Their lips are not pressed as if speaking, but rather the mouths hang agape, to indicate the pure sounds of the body as it faces the obstacles of movement and weight, the exhalation of impact. Cellini's satyr too has an open mouth, grimacing, responding to the load that he is carrying, but the referent for that weight is outside of the image. In Juste de Juste's prints, sound corresponds to the representation of the weight/weightlessness as evinced in the image itself, setting up an entirely independent mode of representation.

This emission of sound can be found in a number of prints emanating from Fontainebleau during this period. Juste's prints also capture the instability and the strong contrast found in other examples, and Rosso's influence is paramount. The gravity defying lightness of figures can be found in Rosso's two depictions of the *Deposition*, while in Italy at the time, these were reproduced in widely circulating prints, and surely Rosso would have shared his artistic output with Juste. The earlier *Deposition* from 1521 has a rich coloring and a dynamic composition, but notably we find the open spaces or voids between figures not at the bottom, but rather at the top of the image, this subversion being at the heart of the grotesque's operation. (Fig. 40) We even find figures that seem precariously poised on top of others, and though the idea is that they are

suspended on ladders, Rosso knowingly has painted them to suggest a lightness and instability. His later Deposition contains similar figures in the background, but it also has a much darker coloration and the figure of Christ himself is heavily articulated, again very noticeably in the chest cavity. (Fig. 41) While Rosso's Christ figure here is much broader chested than Juste's figures, it none the less displays the same minutely observed details and ripples of the body, that suggests that Rosso imparted not only techniques or subjects, but perhaps a way of looking that responded to the emerging field of anatomy.



*Fig. 40 Rosso Fiorentino, Deposition, 1521, oil on canvas*



*Fig. 41 Rosso Fiorentino, Deposition, 1527, oil on canvas*

Through Rosso's career, his figures transform from an early resemblance to Michelangelo's powerfully bulky male nudes, to more emphatically expressive male bodies, expressive through the detailed understanding of the tensed muscle, but also its exaggeration, and this became the vehicle for Rosso's creative output. Rosso and Cellini combined would have served as stellar teachers for Juste, certainly supporting his experimentation with print media.

Not only could they have provided their own work as models, they could have suggested the vast array of appropriate models for study, such as Michelangelo's cartoon for the Battle of Cascina and Da Vinci's Battle of Anghiari, the former especially being profoundly important for Juste's work because of the subject of the male nude. (Fig. 42) Cellini and Rosso alike had studied and worked extensively in Rome, and would have both made use of these images that were readily available throughout Europe, as Cellini describes them, as "the school of the world." Further influences could have included Signorelli's work as well, such as his groups of male nudes within a grotesque tableau at Orvieto. Bernard Schultz has commented on these frescoes, that they "act as a summation for the quattrocento experience of artistic anatomy."<sup>224</sup>



Fig. 42, Aristotile da Sangallo, after Michelangelo, *Battle of Cascina*, 1542, engraving

Campbell has proposed a very different and intriguing interpretation of Rosso's 'indebtedness' to Michelangelo, and posits that Michelangelo's influence was not as monolithic

<sup>224</sup> Schultz, Bernard. *Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy*. Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1985. p. 65.

as some would say.<sup>225</sup> He sees Rosso's anatomical figures as parodying those of Michelangelo, and this may illuminate Juste's operations. We then extrapolate that French use of Rosso's counterpoint is really at the heart of Fontainebleau's unique position. Francois never succeeded in getting Michelangelo to court, and while he may have never even realized Rosso's parody, the vacuum left by the absence of Michelangelo could have allowed this parodic aesthetic to take hold, becoming the dominant voice in the room. While Michelangelo's colossal Hercules loomed over the gardens of Fontainebleau, this does not preclude a self-acknowledged distancing on the part of artists. Juste, via Rosso and Cellini, was then both indebted to Michelangelo, but also cruelly satirizing the figures, such as the satyrs. The parodic aspect can most keenly be seen in the figures of the satyrs in the context of Fontainebleau, where prints often had either overt or indirect connotations of sexual ribaldry. Christine Tauber has also noticed the satirical content, linking the image to the Battle of Cascina as a parodic take on the subject, consonant with the larger themes of Mannerist painting.<sup>226</sup>

### 4.3 Anatomia

Juste's work represents a response to the art around him, as well as to currents of thought. The re-emergent field of anatomy provides an example in which Juste was able to synthesize artistic practice with new modes of conceiving the body pictorially. Like the making of art, the

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<sup>225</sup> Campbell, Stephen J. "Fare Una Cosa Morta Parer Viva: Michelangelo, Rosso, and the (Un)Divinity of Art." *Art Bulletin*. 84, no. 4 (2002): 596-620.

<sup>226</sup> Tauber, 60. She writes, "So werden auch in der manieristischen malerei häufig bereits bestehende Bildlösungen in parodistischer Absicht aufgegriffen und durch Ironisierung überboten, so wie die bizarren Männerphantasien des Juste de Juste, die wohl unter anderem Stellungen aus Michelangelos Schlacht von Cascina persiflieren."

practices of anatomy were undergoing profound changes during the mid-sixteenth century.

Artists were often avid practitioners of this new science, and Juste benefitted from the hands-on ethos of Rosso's own experience with this field as well as its expression through his art.

Anatomical discourse during this period confronted a number of issues: the skeptical view of the Galenic tradition, the sloughing off of Arabic treatises and revisions of ancient Greek texts.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, anatomists newly stressed the direct visual and tangible aspects of dissection over the distance incurred through the traditional role of the medieval lector. In *Books of the Body*, Andrea Carlino documents the changes taking place in the representation of dissection in anatomical treatises from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries.<sup>228</sup> In the earliest treatises that the author examines, the lector is set apart from the actual dissection, which is left to a barber. The lector in these images is often displayed at a physical remove from the body, situated either in a lectern or on a small dais. Gradually this distance lessened and as Carlino gets to Vesalius, the lector is clearly doing the dissecting. In *De Corporis Fabrica*, Vesalius is portrayed as actively engaged in the dissection. Vesalius writes "After I had dissected hundreds of cadavers [surely a rhetorical exaggeration], I understood why few physicians of our time comprehended this art."<sup>229</sup> Clearly Vesalius believes that it is the direct observation of anatomy that "produces the anatomical text."<sup>230</sup> Moreover, the actual tools of dissection are prominently on display. By

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<sup>227</sup> Lind, L. R. *Studies in Pre-Vesalian Anatomy: Biography, Translations, Documents*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1975.

<sup>228</sup> Carlino, Andrea. *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. See Chapter 1.

<sup>229</sup> The brackets are Harcourt's. Quoted in Harcourt, Glenn. "Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture" in *Representations*, No. 17, Special Issue: The Cultural Display of the Body (Winter, 1987), pp. 28-61. p. 35. For the original text, see Vesalius, Andreas, Joannes Oporinus, Philipp Melanchthon, Christian Erhard Kapp, and Johann Wilhelm Schlegel. *Andrae Vesalii Bruxellensis, scholae medicorum Patauinae professoris De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*. Basileae: Ex officina Joannis Oporini, 1543.

<sup>230</sup> Carlino, Andrea. p 45.

having them so, Vesalius, Carlino suggests, underscores his role as both writer of the text, as well as the dissector of its subjects. This was an attempt by Vesalius (and Charles Estienne) to give the field a greater veracity and authenticity beyond previous texts. Subsequent images of dissection frequently depict at least one member of the dissecting group consulting a text, namely that of Vesalius. Nonetheless, social customs and institutional restrictions continued to play a definitive role in the practices of dissection and the exploration of anatomy. Carlino writes “in spite of Vesalius the anatomy lesson continued to be regulated by university statutes for several more decades and to be carried out according to the quodlibertarian model that imposed a precise separation in the roles of the sector and lector, and a specific distance between the reading of the text and the act of dissection.”<sup>231</sup>

At the same time that anatomists and artists explored the body, France and its European neighbors were exploring and colonizing the world. These practices refracted and reinforced one another. In sixteenth century culture, the revitalized science of anatomy provided its practitioners and image-makers opportunities to promote their work in intellectually adventurous ways. Like the artists of the period, and as Juste himself, these new anatomists ascribed their identities into the heroic exploration of this foreign territory: the human body. Jonathon Sawday writes, “these early discoverers dotted their names, like place-names on a map, over the terrain which they encountered. In their voyages, they expressed the intersection of the body and the world at every point, claiming for the body an affinity with the complex design of the universe.”<sup>232</sup> In doing so, these artists and anatomists alike who explored this new cosmos were able to find yet another avenue to intellectual status. Sawday continues, “this congruence

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<sup>231</sup> Carlino, 67-68.

<sup>232</sup> Sawday, 23.



equated scientific endeavor with the triumphant discoveries of the explorers, cartographers, navigators, and early colonialists. And in the production of a new map of the body, a new figure was also to be glimpsed—the scientist as heroic voyager and intrepid discoverer.”<sup>233</sup>

The imaging of this new science was crucial, especially in France. The nation lagged behind the colonial endeavors of Spain and Portugal, and its foray into Brazil in 1555 (a failed project too) was still on the horizon. Instead, François was clearly focused on forging a national ideal bound to the promotion of the arts and sciences. The depiction of an anatomical understanding of the body in prints and other media disseminated this grandiose exploration of a new frontier. These depictions arrived in the midst of a general feeling in the first half of the sixteenth century in France, that its culture had surpassed that of Antiquity, and an optimistic vision of human progress was stimulated by the greatest levels of wealth in France since the end of the Hundred Years War.<sup>234</sup> Inherent in this mythology of progress was also the attendant notion that the ancients were not infallible. The anatomical text represented one locus in this discourse; for the author it presented a chance to surpass the knowledge of antique authorities, and for the artists it offered a route to novel depictions of the human figure. For François, it was a chance to situate the intellectual output of Fontainebleau at the forefront of European culture.<sup>235</sup>

It is no surprise that Charles Estienne’s text *De dissectione partium corporis humani libri tres* is as elaborate as later treatises depicting the new world. The classical borrowing of many of

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 23-24.

<sup>234</sup> Heller, Henry. *Labour, Science, and Technology in France, 1500-1620*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. p. 19-24.

<sup>235</sup> In addition to artworks, François was also a patron of anatomical texts. This patronage means that his artists at Fontainebleau would have been well aware of the texts’ contents. For this patronage, see Roberts, K. B., and J. D. W. Tomlinson. *The Fabric of the Body: European Traditions of Anatomical Illustrations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. p. 166-168.

Estienne's images further emphasizes François's desire for a Gallic vision of antiquity.<sup>236</sup> And the appeal to antiquity through the Marsyas reference provided further legitimation to anatomists and to those that sought to represent the body.

Monique Kornell has noted the myriad senses of the *notomia*/ *anatomia* (these terms were interchangeable in the sixteenth century) that span not only practices of dissection but also could be extended to the prints and drawings that derived from these studies. So in its broadest sense Juste's prints could be anatomies in the vein of the *écorché* models, which they most closely resemble. Not only would Juste have Vesalius' anatomical text to draw from, Charles Estienne's manuscript though unpublished in 1543, was circulating through France. This text, *De dissectione partium corporis humani* was published in 1545, but a number of the illustrative plates date from the 1530s. Kornell has studied Rosso's own interest in anatomy and his association with the Estienne text, and has further elucidated the myriad methods and representations of the anatomical body. The second edition of Vasari's life of Rosso notes that the artist had a book of anatomy of his own in preparation. There simply is no escaping the very large role that the emergent anatomical modes of observation would have had on artmaking at this time, and certainly artists at Fontainebleau were well conversant in this new vocabulary. The assurance with which Fontainebleau's artists distorted, extended and de-classicised the body is indicative of a vast familiarity with the proportions and modulations of the human form. These new endeavors into anatomy revealed multiple senses of *notomia* /*anatomia* in the sixteenth century. These could refer to the actual physical structure of humans or animals, a book on the subject, or the act of dissection, but also to images made through drawing or printing of

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<sup>236</sup> For a discussion of the use of classical sources for anatomical images, see Harcourt (1987).

anatomical figure, and later écorché models.<sup>237</sup> Summers discusses the practice that Michelangelo used that involved wax models, about which de Hollanda wrote Michelangelo was "removing the skin little by little" of the cadaver, whereby the artist was able to take muscles and make wax molds of them so that he would "be able to place them in another body as he wishes in the manner that they were in the flesh." Cellini further describes such wax bodies as "studiatissimi modegli" or "carefully designed models". They moreover emphasize the flaying of the body, as in depictions of Marsyas, as well as in works of Titian and Michelangelo.<sup>238</sup> Hence a parallel emerges between the practices of active dissection and the investigation of the human body by artists and there is further evidence that Michelangelo himself was not only concerned with the outward aspects of the body, but also with the "mechanics of physical movement."<sup>239</sup> Juste's figures appear to not only display aspects of the musculature, but also the skeletal frame beneath. If Condivi was correct, and Michelangelo's never-written anatomical treatise was to include a discussion of bones, then Juste's work is a reflection of this new level of anatomical inquiry. But Juste is also making a clear set of aesthetic choices, and his work indicates that the emergent vocabulary of anatomical study was not yet set in stone. Vincenzo Danti's unpublished treatise gave priority to bones, but as Summers notes, for Danti, the skeleton was "integral to his theory of proportion". Juste's work establishes an antique classical route to the aesthetic considerations of notomia in the sixteenth century. He conflates the imitation or transmission of the antique grotesque form with the active investigation of the human body.

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<sup>237</sup> Kornell, 842.

<sup>238</sup> The aspect of flaying may have a precedent as early as Signorelli's figures at Orvieto, for which Schultz indicates an existent preparatory drawing in the collection at Windsor. Schultz suggests that this drawing indicates that Signorelli may have been present at dissections, and the drawing displays a thigh that has the appearance of having been flayed. See Schultz, p. 65-66, n. 137 (p.223). See also Popham, A.E. and J. Wilde, *The Italian Drawings of the XV and XVI Centuries at Windsor Castle*. London: 1949. p. 177.

<sup>239</sup> Summers, 399.

Cellini himself noted that the use of the skeleton was important for establishing the order of the body, and looked to Michelangelo as the authority on the subject.<sup>240</sup> But Juste is clearly establishing his own order, and the prints reflect the odd paradigm in which artists had an intensifying infatuation with anatomy and the representation of the body down to its tiniest details, while they simultaneously created images that distorted the human body to whatever ends. In short, for all of the curiosity and observation of the human form, the representation of the human form did not result in a more naturalistic approach. Rather, this observation fuelled a greater license in the depiction of the body. Muscles are lengthened and bones made in disparate proportional systems. Juste's prints capture this tension, and the shallowly etched plates reveal his approach to this process. Juste's anatomies are tentative; the chest cavities are scratched and open, and yet multiple lines appear as if to say that these figures are undergoing active exploration. Rosso's *Fury*, created in the 1520s and engraved by Caraglio provides another example of this juxtaposition. (Fig. 43) The horrid figure is a dessicated study of the body set in a dramatic, nightmarish corridor, surrounded by beasts. Rosso in his youth was rumored to have disinterred bodies in order to investigate the remains. By the time that he was at Fontainebleau, anatomy was becoming a standard part of an artist's education. Kornell notes that Rosso's *Fury* displays the *notomia secca* or dry anatomy advocated by Mundinus, whereby it was easier to investigate the "sun-dried body, for this is less laborious than dissection." And yet again, we see the lightness of step, the lack of structural reality, and perhaps the parodic take on Michelangelo's heroic figures.

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<sup>240</sup> Summers, 403-404, See also see also B. Castiglione. *Opere di Baldassare Castiglione, Giovanni della Casa, Benvenuto Cellini*. Ed. C. Cordiè, Milan-Naples, 1960, especially p. 1116-7.



*Fig. 43 Caraglio, after Rosso, Fury, engraving*

On the one hand, artists are interested and in some ways compelled to investigate new ways of looking at and depicting the body, and yet, as we see even in certain passages of Vesalius there is also a filter that separates the actual messiness of the dissected body and its representation in art. All of the prints in both Vesalius's text and that of Charles Estienne are very generalized images of the human body, and there has been a tendency in art history as least, to suggest that these works are more artistic than scientific. (Fig. 44 and 45)

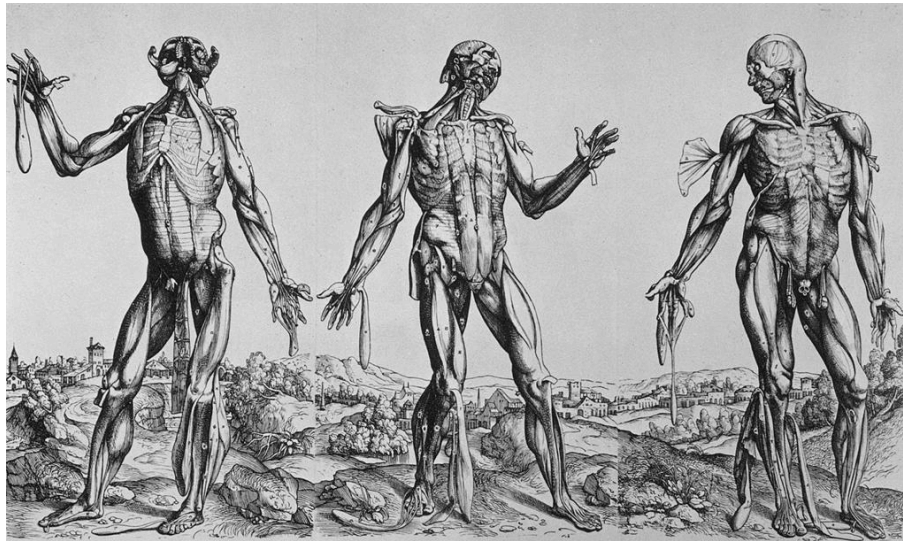


Fig. 44 image from Vesalius, from the *De Corporis Fabrica*

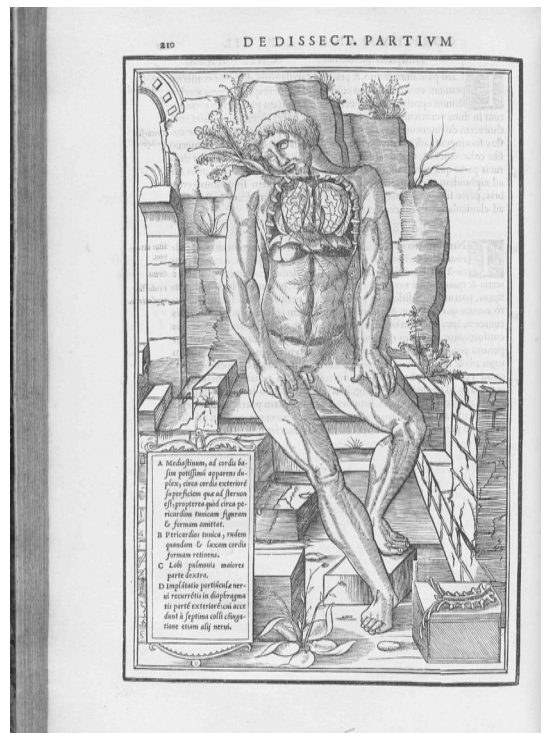


Fig. 45 image from Charles Estienne's *De dissectione partium corporis humani*

Vesalius provided a more systematic and comprehensive text than Galen and others, and yet social prohibitions barred his emphatic portrayal of directly observed details. In one passage he describes how he asked the barbers who usually did the actual dissections to 'step aside' in order that he could do his own dissecting and explaining of the body to his students. The sheer fact that it was not the anatomists themselves who were customarily doing the dissections during this period but rather the lowly barbers is indicative of the field's status at the time. And of course, anatomists and artists alike had to keep this distance in order to keep the law at bay. But it is a transitional moment; just a few years later we have Ambroise Paré stating very emphatically in his *Monsters and Marvels*, "I have seen with my own eyes..."<sup>241</sup> This indicates the insulation that official sanction could give anatomists in France. While Leonardo da Vinci was still alive and working at Amboise (1516-1519), Antonio de Beatis documents the artist's activities in dissection. He writes:

This gentleman has written on anatomy in a manner never yet attempted by anyone else: quite exhaustively, with painted illustrations not only of the limbs but of the muscles, tendons, veins, joints, intestines, and every other feature of the human body, both male and female. We saw this with our own eyes, and indeed he informed us that he has dissected more than thirty corpses, including males and females of all ages.<sup>242</sup>

But ultimately these representations are distilled through the medium of the account or anatomical text. They still provide a distance between the viewer and the anatomical practice of

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<sup>241</sup> Paré, Ambroise, and Janis L. Pallister. *On Monsters and Marvels*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

<sup>242</sup> Beatis, Antonio, and J R. Hale. *The Travel Journal of Antonio De Beatis: Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries, France and Italy, 1517-1518*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1979. p. 132.

dissection. A further remove can be found in visual art, where artists routinely employed standardized figures rather than mimetic ones to disseminate the corpse image. Ornament provides yet another foil for the veiling of a specific body, and allows rather for a very stylized and in some ways didactic approach to the figure (the articulation of individual muscles or bones for instance).

Jonathan Sawday explores the cultural role that anatomy played beyond pure scientific inquiry. He points out the vogue for the very term *anatomy* in sixteenth and seventeenth century England for instance.<sup>243</sup> This fascination, which certainly had a hold in France as well reveals the far greater curiosity about the body and its role in human destiny. Pain, sex, death: these are the larger cultural underpinnings of the new science—to satiate a desire for desire, as well as to titillate. The depiction of Marsyas as a cypher for this discourse exposes the layers of cultural meaning. Sawday writes:

The confrontation between Marsyas and Apollo perfectly expressed the contradictory emotions to be uncovered in the realm of Anatomia. Her servants were dedicated to achieving knowledge of the human body in order to alleviate pain and suffering, and yet the knowledge was only gained at the cost of enormous pain to the victims who, eventually, arrived in the anatomy theatres.<sup>244</sup>

Grotesques often have elements of a funerary nature, urns, buccrania, wreaths, birds such as eagles, that were utilized not only in French tombs of the period but also occur in Italy at the time. In French prints, one notices a large array of empty cartouches in grotesque designs, and this void hangs over the work of *Juste de Juste*. While his signature delineates the composition,

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<sup>243</sup> Sawday, 43-53.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 187.



like other grotesques his prints of grouped male nudes also have a void at the center, as do more traditional grotesques and their cartouches. Rosso died in 1540 from an apparent suicide, and Cellini relates that his former assistants agreed to perpetuate his style under his successor Primaticcio at Fontainebleau. All of the above factors combined suggest that Juste's prints, amongst other possible operations, were meant to act as an elegy for Rosso. The grotesque combined with the signatory qualities that stem from late Gothic practice, allude to emblematic practice, as Ethan Matt Kavalier has noted elsewhere, the "potential service of inventive decorative motifs as personal or institutional devices owed much to a gradual abatement in the use of heraldic imagery under Burgundian and Hapsburg rulers and to a general proliferation of signs of identity in European society".<sup>245</sup> This suggests that not only could the person be signified, but personal acts as well could be emblemized, and that grotesques provided a forum for the display of anything from desire to loss. In "De l'amitié" Montaigne conflates loss, love and grotesque form when writing an elegy for his recently deceased friend Etienne de la Boetie:

I was watching an artist on my staff working on a painting when I felt a desire to emulate him. The finest place in the middle of a wall he selects for a picture to be executed to the best of his ability; then he fills up the empty spaces all round it with *grotesques*, which are fantastical paintings whose attractiveness consists merely in variety and novelty. And in truth what are these *Essays* if not monstrosities and *grotesques* botched together from a variety of limbs having no defined shape, with an order sequence and proportion which are purely fortuitous?<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Kavalier, Ethan Matt. "Gothic as renaissance : ornament, excess, and identity, circa 1500" in *Renaissance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2008. p. 230.

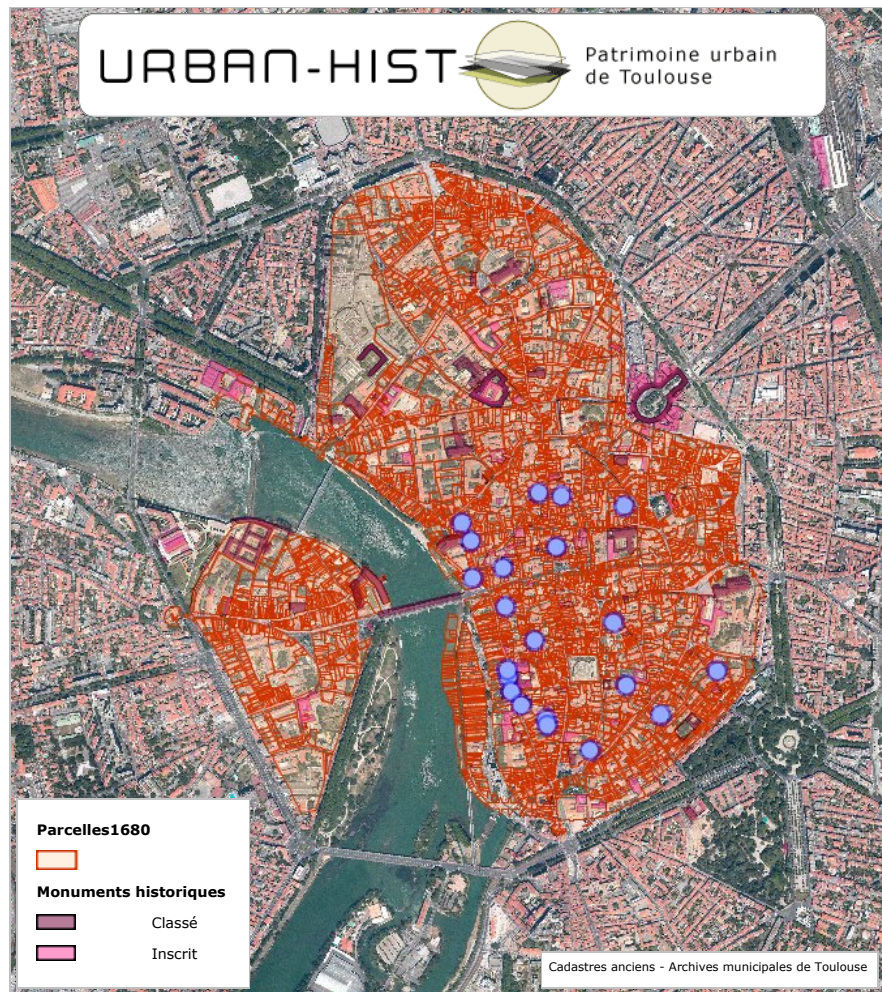
<sup>246</sup> Montaigne, Michel de, and M. A. Screech. *The Complete Essays*. London, England: Penguin Books, 1993. p. 205-206. The italics are Schreech's.

What Montaigne shows us, is an empty creative center in his essay. The essay is an elegy for his dead friend, an absence, but from that lack, we find also a creative flourish that enables Montaigne's self-portrait. Like the grotesque motif itself, the essay presents the paradoxes of creation and destruction, love, loss, etc. And all of these forces underlie the creation of Juste de Juste's prints. There is no single center, rather these prints represent a nexus of meaning. They establish the artist's attempt to forge an identity, they demonstrate the range of artistic influences on that artist, and they suggest the new ways that artists in the mid-sixteenth century were depicting their subjects.

## 5 Toulouse: Grotesques as Metaphor in the City

This chapter will explore the role that grotesque ornament played within the city of Toulouse during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What differentiates this chapter from others is that it aims to explore the use of grotesques on a collective level, and how it was reflective of a corporate desire for cultural relevance. These were tumultuous centuries for Toulouse, a period that saw phenomenal economic expansion in the first half of the sixteenth century, which ended abruptly with the outbreak of religious civil wars in 1562. This boom and bust was mirrored by the rapid rise of the merchant class, and its increasing stake in the *Capitoulat*, (a body of civic magistrates) that was later eclipsed by the regional Parlement, a body bestowed on the city by the monarchy in the fifteenth century, the powers of which were rapidly broadened in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These shifts in power were seen in the buying and selling of aristocratic houses (*hôtels particuliers*) that changed hands from *Capitouls* to *Parlementaires* with quick succession. The forecourts and façades of these houses were spaces on which ornament was rigorously displayed, and these ornamental motifs acted as metaphors for social aspirations and affiliations. The facades of three *hôtel particuliers* will be explored here: the Hôtel Molinier, the Hôtel Berenguier-Maynier and the Hôtel de Bagis, all of which were ultimately owned and renovated by Parlementaire families and all of which are nestled within close proximity of Notre Dame de la Dalbade.

Modern day Toulouse is arrayed on the east and west sides of the Garonne River. The city has expanded in all directions from the smaller nucleus of eight administrative units (or capitoulats) that comprised the city during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (Fig. 46)



*Fig. 46 Map of Toulouse showing location of hôtels particuliers*

At first glance, Toulouse, located in the southwestern corner of France, 366 miles from Paris and just north of the Pyrenees, represents a peripheral response to the new aesthetics of the sixteenth century. When examined more closely, however, the city presents its own unique architectural character and history contingent on local context, and continental aspirations. Stolidly autonomous, Toulouse reconstructed itself in the sixteenth century, fashioning an architectural language that responded to new tastes in ornament and order. To this day, many of

the buildings and facades that exemplify this change are still intact and as a whole represent a remarkably intact French Renaissance city. Moreover, the unique character of brickwork in these buildings suggests how local artists adapted available materials to Renaissance types. The *Annales* of the city administration (*capitouls*) further reveal the heady aspirations of the city's leaders, looking for a city face that rivalled the ancients as well as those of fifteenth century Italy. Within this matrix of ideals and practical construction, it is possible to assess the role of ornament, and in Toulouse the use of grotesques is profound. Ubiquitous on city facades from both the sixteenth and seventeenth century, these ornaments certainly suggest a palpable element in the clash between city factions, civic ambitions, and cultural diaspora.

In 1463 a massive fire struck the city of Toulouse, devastating its eastern quarter of the Dalbade that lies along the eastern bank of the Garonne River. Prior to the fifteenth century the area had been inhabited primarily by craftsmen and tradeworkers, such as butchers and carpenters. But the fire occurred within the midst of massive social and cultural shifts taking place, and the sudden availability of land precipitated a real estate boom. Broad swathes of newly cleared land were earmarked for grandiose building projects for the city's newly ennobled *capitouls* and their rivals in the Parlement of Toulouse. These constructions coincided with a European-wide movement to create spaces to legitimize and enhance the authority of a ruling elite" as noted by George L. Gorse in his study of Renaissance Genoa.<sup>247</sup> As did aristocratic families in Genoa, elite residents of Toulouse were emboldened by theories of magnificence and its display that coincided with the reconfiguration of the building's role as a visual exemplar within the space of the city. The notion of the façade had emerged in Italian culture in the

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<sup>247</sup> Gorse, George L. "A Classical Stage for the Old Nobility: The Strada Nuova and Sixteenth-Century Genoa". *Art Bulletin*. 79, no. 2 (1997): 301-327. p. 301.

fourteenth century, derived from the Latin *facies* (appearance, face) and mingled with the term *faccia*, which at the time “had both a geometric meaning, as the face of a polyhedron, and an architectural one.”<sup>248</sup> Later in the fifteenth century, Filarete noted how the façade ‘speaks’ and gave meaning to both the structure and to the street.<sup>249</sup> *Fassade* first appears in French in 1565, and appears as *façade* in 1611, and these were terms clearly imported from the Italian.<sup>250</sup> In short, by the time that Toulousains began to build their palatial hôtels complete with ornate, grotesque facades, there was well underway a European tendency to use that space to display a family’s status within a given community. The façade acted as the most immediate area of revelation of a family’s role within the social hierarchy, and hence it was given a special priority in the design of its composition and ornamentation. Paolo Cortesi (1465-1510) even went so far, Burroughs suggests, to assert that the grandeur of a façade could prevent a palace from being attacked.<sup>251</sup> The vast majority of Renaissance studies of palatial facades have centered on Italian examples, and Toulouse furthermore provides an opportunity to explore local reaction not only to imported Italian texts, but also to the spectre of French examples emanating from Fontainebleau. The earliest use of *fassade* appeared in contracts relating to the building of royal palaces in France, and awareness of the term, and the use of the façade as a concept in Toulouse is contemporaneous, and perhaps even predates this development.

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<sup>248</sup> Friedman, David. “Palaces and the Street in Late-Medieval and Renaissance Italy” in Whitehand, J. W. R., and P. J. Larkham. *Urban Landscapes: International Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 1992. p. 69-113. See p. 93.

<sup>249</sup> Filarete was referring to the Palazzo Rucellai. See note 7, page 9 of Burroughs, Charles. “The Building’s Face and the Herculean Paradigm: Agendas and Agency in Roman Renaissance Architecture”. *Res.* 1993: 7-30. See also Filarete, and John Richard Spencer. *Treatise on Architecture; Being the Treatise by Antonio Di Piero Averlino, Known As Filarete*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.

<sup>250</sup> For *fassade*, see Laborde, Léon, and Jules Guiffrey. *Les comptes des bâtiments du roi (1528-1571) suivis de documents inédits sur les châteaux royaux et les beaux-arts au XVIe siècle*. Paris: J. Baur, 1877. Vol. II, p.112.

<sup>251</sup> Burroughs, 1993, p. 13.

Following the Albigensian Crusades of the thirteenth century, Toulouse's medieval tradition of self-rule was brought to an end save one exception: the right to choose its own governing council, the capitoulat. Originally consisting of 24 members, by the fifteenth century this number had been reduced to eight. Each capitoul was elected for one year, and each represented a section (capitoulat) of the city. From 1459, holding the position automatically ennobled those who served on the council, and this privilege was further extended to the capitouls' families and descendants.

This last feature was of particular importance to the swelling ranks of newly wealthy merchants in the pastel trade. Toulouse's economy expanded rapidly in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century from this trade in purple dye. Prior to the discovery of indigo in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, pastel (or woad) was the only indelible blue dye available. Growing on the southern and eastern outskirts of Toulouse, this commodity was exploited to respond to growing demands from a booming European wide textile boom. Toulouse in effect became the major center for the propagation and distribution of this precious dye, and helped to establish Toulouse as a major commercial center in Western Europe. Almost overnight, the city was transformed from a regional hub specializing in trade and wheat to a major player in Europe's modernizing economy. Unfortunately, a series of bad harvests spelled the equally rapid end to the pastel trade that was further disturbed by the outbreak of civil war in 1562. Toulouse was never able to catch up with the newly discovered indigo trade. Instead, Toulouse's economy built off of its strength in legal education, and served as the major center of judicial affairs in southwest France by virtue of its Parlement.

The pastel trade itself was important as well for the number of merchants that it attracted from across Europe. From Burgos it attracted the Bernuys and the Assezats, as well as families from northern Europe. These families descended on Toulouse to partake in the burgeoning industry. So profound was the pastel trade for these newly established merchant families, that the motif of the pastel leaf became a prolific element in much architectural decoration.<sup>252</sup> Moreover, the burgeoning economy of the city attracted artists and artisans from across France, and further afield.

### 5.1 Competing for Influence

Following the 1463 fire, Toulouse was radically transformed: streets were widened, new buildings erected and the Hotel de Ville refurbished. As part of their limited power extended to patronage of such works, the capitouls found themselves at the forefront of much of this activity.<sup>253</sup> In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries their successes were celebrated publicly through the city, and they could be seen annually parading in scarlet and black ermine robes purchased by the city. Though the city administration itself operated through three other councils, the capitouls themselves served as a public face for the city as their power had a distinct connection to Toulouse's earlier self-rule. But the rise of the Parlementaires would undermine this.

Toulouse's royal Parlement was the second oldest in France, second only to that of Paris itself. Traditionally it served as the King's representative in both administrative and judicial

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<sup>252</sup> The definitive work on the pastel trade in Toulouse is Gilles Caster's *Le commerce du pastel et de l'épicerie à Toulouse, de 1450 à 1561*. Ed. Privat, Toulouse, 1962.

<sup>253</sup> Schneider, Robert A. "Crown and capitoulat: municipal government in Toulouse 1500-1789" in Benedict, Philip. *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989. p. 195-220.



affairs. But through the sixteenth and seventeenth century's parliamentary magistrates swelled the ranks of Toulouse's municipal institutions. This resulted not only in a consolidation of royal power but rivalry between factions for representation of the city. Schneider writes that "the dramatic growth of the sovereign court since its founding in 1444 reshaped the city as a whole, endowing it with a body of prominent and powerful men whose ranks by the mid-sixteenth century were more than fifty strong."<sup>254</sup> That number had doubled by the seventeenth century, and the rivalry between the *Parlementaires* and the *capitouls* reached a fever pitch. Both groups competed for supremacy in the city, and much of this rivalry was hashed out through very public displays. Again, Schneider points out "in 1578, for example, the *Parlement* decreed that henceforth the *capitouls* were forbidden to march before the magistrates in public processions."<sup>255</sup> During the sixteenth century, much of this rivalry was enacted through a competitive display of wealth and status, but for the *capitouls* it also signaled an anxiety over threatened autonomy not only for themselves but rather for the city as a whole. By the advent of the Bourbon regimes of the seventeenth century, many of their fears were realized as the *Parlement* answered solely to central authorities in Paris and then Versailles. Furthermore, a number of *capitouls* were joining the ranks of the *Parlement* by the turn of the century.

The hegemony of the *Parlement* also seems to correspond to the waning of the pastel trade. Many of the magnificent houses that had been erected by the wealthy pastel merchants were subsequently acquired by *Parlementaires*, and often expanded or augmented in ways that further suggest the very public nature of these rivalries. But there was yet another faction to contend with: the ecclesiastical authorities. Toulouse had been a major religious center since the

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<sup>254</sup> Schneider in Benedict, p. 197-199.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 199.

Middle Ages for its strategic location along the route to Santiago de Compostela. Furthermore, it had a history of a vigilant Inquisition, originally founded to crush the Albigensian heresy.<sup>256</sup> The parlementaires sat atop a social hierarchy, and while their main rivals tend to be depicted as the capitouls, the most emphatic competition for hegemony came from the ecclesiastical authorities - the Archbishop and other clergyman.<sup>257</sup> The religious orders of the city experienced pronounced growth through the thirteenth century directly through to the seventeenth century.<sup>258</sup> Tollon writes that because of the wars of religion, these new orders built not only places for worship but expanded the city's hospitals, seminaries and other civic institutions. Lamoignon de Basville wrote in his *Mémoire historique et politique de la Province du Languedoc* (1698) "Les couvents des religieux et des religieuses occupent la moitié de la ville."<sup>259</sup> Pérouse de Montclos points out that it is also through the relationship to Rome by way of the clergy that we have the diffusion of art that is so important to the fostering of Renaissance styles and vocabulary; he also points out the aristocracy's relationship to Milan.<sup>260</sup> Moreover, during the seventeenth century, civil architecture was marked largely by the clergy, such as the Hôtel de Lestang commissioned by the Bishop of Lodève, Chrisophe de Lestang, begun in 1595 and the Hôtel Saint-Jean, begun by the grand prior of the order of Malta, Paul-Antoine de Robin-Graveson in 1668.<sup>261</sup> There were other

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<sup>256</sup> Mundy, John Hine. *Society and Government at Toulouse in the Age of the Cathars*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997.

<sup>257</sup> Tollon, Bruno. "L'humanisme dans l'architecture toulousaine, Rencontres entre artistes et savants conseillers" in Dauvois, Nathalie. *L'humanisme à Toulouse: 1480-159 : actes du colloque international de Toulouse, mai 2004*. Paris: H. Champion, 2006. p. 35.

<sup>258</sup> Tollon, Bruno. "La Ville de Brique" in Institut français d'architecture. Toulouse: les délices de l'imitation. Bruxelles: P. Mardaga, 1986, p. 24.

<sup>259</sup> Institut français, 24-25

<sup>260</sup> Erlande-Brandenburg, Alain, Anne-Bénédicte Mérel-Brandenburg, Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos, and François Loyer. *Histoire de l'architecture française*. Paris: Mengès, 1989. 85.

<sup>261</sup> Taillefer, Michel. *Vivre à Toulouse sous l'Ancien régime*. Paris: Perrin, 2000. p. 26-27.

forces competing for influence including members of the Royal courts as well as university authorities. While all of these groups formed a core within the social hierarchy, the merchants within the city held variable positions, ranging from those engaged in small-scale commercial activities to incredibly wealthy bankers.<sup>262</sup>

The countryside around Toulouse experienced this domination firsthand as many public officials purchased land in vast quantities, often gaining not only the land but also the title of Seigneur. So vast was this new acquisition of land by Toulouse's elite that by 1674, a survey showed that the "officeholding class owned 42 percent of the seigneuries" and that "within a twelve-mile radius of Toulouse, city dwellers possessed nearly three-quarters of the domains, the majority owned by officeholders."<sup>263</sup> This vast shift in land tenure coincided with a renewed aesthetic that was simultaneously tied to the royal court as it was to the pastoral mode. This is demonstrated in the pastoral quality of Guillaume Catel's frontispiece for his *Histoire des Comtes de Tolose*, which appeared in 1623. (Fig. 47) Drawing from the revival of pastoral imagery and poetry popular throughout France at this time, the engraving underscores the vast distance between the real landholdings of the rural population, and the mythical Arcadia that disguised elite privilege.

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<sup>262</sup> Schneider, Robert Alan. *Public Life in Toulouse, 1463-1789: From Municipal Republic to Cosmopolitan City*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. p. 35.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

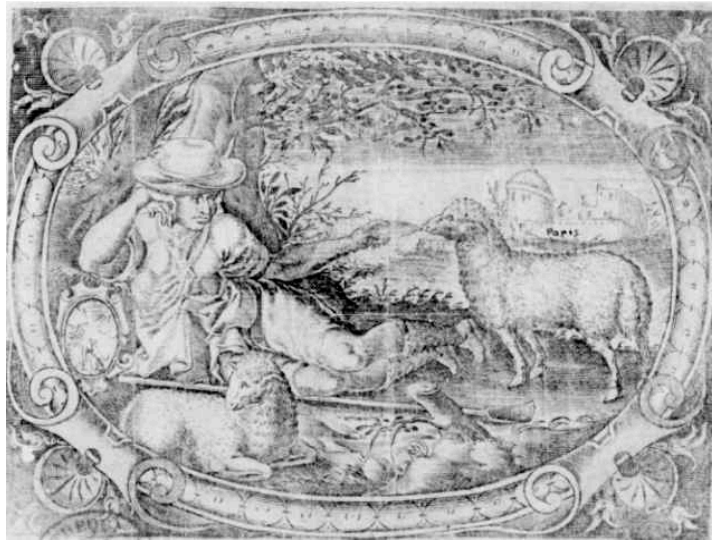


Fig. 47 from Guillaume Catel, *Histoire des Comtes de Tolose*, 1623, frontispiece

In short, Toulouse in the fifteenth century was well on its way to becoming a Renaissance city. The newly conscious sense of urban renewal and planning became an integral part of the city's image and elite members of this society also embarked on a massive amount of their distinctive displays of wealth and status. There is very much the sense of "magnificence" being used as a rationale for such displays as it was in fifteenth century Florence or elsewhere, and much of the literature of the period also decries Toulouse's noble Roman past. The second generation of pastel merchant families in turn went not into commerce but into universities, studying closely the humanist texts and gaining an understanding of intellectual and aesthetic debates of the era. Tollon notes that many of the children of recently wealthy merchants didn't go into commerce, but rather joined the Parliament of Toulouse.<sup>264</sup> A seat in the Parlement was a guarantor of income, and the monarchy favored the expansion of this body. Not only did the

<sup>264</sup> Tollon in Institut français, 25.

Parlement instill privileges and prestige on the city as TOLLON points, but also worked to secure its economic expansion while simultaneously creating a corps of men obligated to the royal court.

## **5.2 Architecture Overview**

Toulouse is most often referred to as the ‘La Ville Rose’ on account of its conspicuous use of brick throughout buildings in the city. This use of brick has an important link to antiquity but it can also be traced to the medieval churches of St. Sernin and Les Jacobins, both built during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These churches gave Toulouse a pronounced history of Romanesque architecture that was supplemented by the Gothic structures of St. Etienne to the East and Notre Dame de la Dalbade. In the southern sector of the city, the Chateau Narbonnais, the ancient seat of the Counts of Toulouse also held the headquarters of the Inquisition. Each of these structures was undergoing some kind of major work in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the case of St. Sernin, this consisted of new decorative painting schemes for the choir and other sections of the church, whereas for the Chateau Narbonnais, it was completely dismantled in the mid-sixteenth century. Hence, not only were new domestic dwellings being constructed but almost the entire city was undergoing a radical transformation beginning in the fifteenth century. Many structures that were once wood, were now reconstructed in brick, and houses were consolidated into ever larger constructions as the wealth of various members of society came to be represented through the acquisition of magnificent dwellings. And similarly, as new buildings were going up, others were coming down, and there would have been a near constant exchange between the death and renewal of urban structures. Moreover, at any given

time, there were artists in the city working in Romanesque, Gothic and antique modes of painting and sculpture.

These large, urban homes, the *hôtels particuliers*, took on a standard form beginning in the sixteenth century. In general, they consisted of a prominent façade fronting the street, usually entered via a portal, a form that became increasingly elaborate in the seventeenth century, as they were in Paris and elsewhere. This entrance opened onto the *cour d'honneur*, or entrance court that would have been faced on one to three sides by storeys of the inner house. These storeys generally presented windows with a number of decorative features, and were often punctuated by towers with spiral, Gothic inflected staircases in the corners. Beyond the central compartments of the house, one would have found a garden that expanded to the boundaries of the property. In the seventeenth century, these schemes took on an increasingly axial orientation proceeding from the portal through to the rear garden. However, the organic, urban quality of many of these parcels provided unique variations and challenges for hired architects. Because the house itself was ultimately hidden from view from the street, the complex façade and the entrance portal took on a prominent role in the representation of a given family's wealth, status, and allegiances.

Most importantly for this study, many of these constructions, from domestic dwellings to ecclesiastical institutions, adopted some form of grotesque imagery beginning in the early sixteenth century. This motif could be found on church and house facades alike, and formed a primary motif in decorative schemes on both interior and exterior surfaces. All of Toulouse's elites at some time commissioned grotesque ornament, cathedral authorities, capitouls and Parlementaires alike. Not only were grotesques part of larger decorative programs but their

addition to a site could be *the* program, as they were at St. Sernin, a project that I will return to below.

### 5.3 Les Hôtels Particuliers

Between 1474 and 1483, Pierre Dahus commissioned his hotel, which was to become the Hotel Berenguier Maynier. (Fig. 48) At the beginning of the construction, Dahus became a capitoul of the city, and the hotel was constructed largely in a Gothic style.<sup>265</sup>



*Fig. 48 Hôtel Berenguier- Maynier, Toulouse, France, sixteenth century*

Upon his death, the hotel passed into several different hands, but then settled in those of another capitoul and law professor Berenguier Maynier. It was at this time that several inscriptions were applied to the forecourt, “On vit par l’esprit, tout le reste est le proie à la mort” and others relating directly to the architecture itself as the house underwent expansion. These other

<sup>265</sup> Papillault, Remi. *Les hôtels particuliers du XVIème siècle à Toulouse*. Haute-Garonne: Association Les Amis des Archives de la Haute-Garonne, 1996. p.129.

inscriptions included “la demeure construite par l’éloquence du professeur Maynier est florissante” and “Faux conseils et mauvaises têtes m’ont fait bâtir ces fenêtres”. Renovations of the hotel under Berenguier-Maynier included clarifying the spaces between garden and forecourt, as well as the addition of lateral aisles.<sup>266</sup> It wasn’t until the third phase of construction that the hotel took on its truly Renaissance character, with the addition of grotesque ornamentation after it was purchased in 1547 by Jean Burnet, a doctor of law who in turn became a Parlementaire. Under Burnet, faux machicolation was added to the hotel’s anachronistic tower (angled to compensate for the angle of the tower), the forecourt was geometricized and the portal set on an axis. Most importantly, the architectural decoration was made over in the latest style, with caryatid figures around the windows and grotesques abounding throughout the interior and exterior spaces.<sup>267</sup> (Fig. 49) This house follows much the same pattern as others in Toulouse, a large house purchased or erected by a wealthy merchant or other notable, and then remodeled and enlarged under a new owner, a member of the Parlement.

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> In addition to the exterior grotesque ornament, the interiors of the hotel were decorated in this style, as attested by the chimney ornaments and other interior specimens currently in the collection of the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse.





*Fig. 49 postcard showing detail of Atlantid figure decoration Hotel Berenguiier Maynier, Toulouse, France, sixteenth century*

What is striking about this example is that certain features such as the tower were retained in the overall renovations in the mid-sixteenth century and were in turn adapted to new tastes.

Moreover, the style of grotesque ornament introduced is similar to the emphatic grotesques made popular at Fontainebleau less than a decade before. The caryatid figures lunge off the walls in a way echoing the very robust physical figures of the Galerie François Ier. These are in turn combined both inward and outwardly with the more classical grotesques, the motifs of urns, lamps and birds that were to be found throughout the surfaces of the hotel.

Jean Burnet, in a sense, desired to harness the anachronism of the older, Gothic hotel, and rather than simply demolishing parts or completely defacing them, he ordered that they be used as transformed surfaces, regulated, but in turn, stylized to current tastes. He was working against the conservative, fifteenth century references of the *Annales* of the Capitouls, and was pushing the architecture of Toulouse into the direction of a court aesthetic. It is as if this architecture was meant to suggest a new order, one in which the Parlement acted as agent of the monarchy, and supplanted the autonomy of the old order of the capitouls, founded on medieval rank and privileges. And this is exactly what was gradually happening in the last half of the sixteenth century and came to be cemented in the seventeenth. That this new architectural ornament was represented in secular, individualistic terms, but throughout the corporate body (of the Parlement) suggests a cohesive visual program to the reordering of the civic government. The hotels of the Parlementaires posed a physical and mental bloc to the Gothic one of the capitoulat.

A rich study could emerge from the study of sixteenth century uses of cabochons (large polished stones of different varieties) set in architectural façades. Though they are not quite the same iconographic iteration of grotesques as the example at Berenguier Maynier, the cabochons of the Hôtel Molinier provide a persuasive example of how this ornament could easily be seen as an extension of the grotesque motif. (Fig. 50) Though the foundations of this particular house are difficult to determine, its façade is nothing short of “bavard.”<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Papillaut, 167.



*Fig. 50 Entry portal Hôtel Molinier, Toulouse, France, sixteenth century*

The purchase of the exact plot is unknown, but Papillaut suggests after examining cadastral maps from 1478 that there were in fact two parcels, one owned by Jean de Moret, and the other by Jacques Beneyt that were ultimately united once they were purchased by Gaspard Molinier. Molinier is listed in a notarial document as “Monsieur maistre Gaspard Molinier, conseiller du roy en la cour du Parlement...” from 1550.<sup>269</sup> It is a typical urban home for Toulouse, consisting of a cour d’honneur, a central block with living space, a staircase tower, and a garden at the back. Nonetheless, this a rather narrow domicile, and the porte d’entrée occupies much of the street façade on the rue de la Dalbade. Documents show that Molinier was augmenting the living spaces as early as 1552, and a 1556 document (*bail à besogne*) attests to the construction of the porte d’entrée by Raymond de Bossac and Jean Molières, both of whom

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<sup>269</sup> Quoted in Papillaut, 168.

were listed as *maçon* on the project. The style of the portal was also extended into the cour d'honneur, but this part of the construction appears to have been changed in the eighteenth century, though the portal itself remained untouched. However, Papillaut mentions that in 1619 Ayamable de Cathelan ordered renovations to the building on its north side, and that the portal was “remaniée” but he does not describe to what extent these changes would have affected the way that the entrance looks today.<sup>270</sup>

Jules de Lahondès dates the corbelled turret in the corner of the cour d'honneur to 1534.<sup>271</sup> This turret itself does not have grotesques per se, but its decorative corbel, putti and wreaths suggest a three dimensional floating type often found in grotesques. Mesplé similarly noted the largely sculptural quality of the court on account of this.<sup>272</sup> This quality adds to the overwhelmingly decorative function of the space. The portal entry is surrounded by double sets of Corinthian columns on pedestals, a frieze with heavy stones (cabochons) made of expensively quarried stones such as lapis, pink granite and porphyry. The second register consists of a central cartouche with gemstones set as cabochons and a central faceted stone. (Fig. 51) This cartouche is surrounded by an egg and dart frame, and is flanked on each side by caryatid figures, one male, and one female. To the further reaches of the left and right, Glaucus figures are situated atop strapwork frames that contain round cabochons, and a bevy of fruits and female bust figures. Two rounded-arch windows define the uppermost register. In between these is a central cabochon with a beveled edge (giving it the reference to a family coat of arms) framed by small

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<sup>270</sup> Papillaut, 172.

<sup>271</sup> Société archéologique du Midi de la France, and Jules de Lahondès. *L'oeuvre des architectes toulousains: aux XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Toulouse: E. Privat, 1923. p. 4. However, Lahondès does not provide a reference for this date. He also named Gaspard Molinier as Guillaume, but I have chosen to follow Papillaut's more recent research.

<sup>272</sup> Mesplé, Paul. *Vieux hôtels de Toulouse*. Toulouse: Editions du Pays d'Oc, 1948. p. 57.

satyrs grasping at the beards of metamorphosing creatures that appear griffin-like. A female head presides over this assemblage wearing a fruit wreath; urns flank this central feature and are strongly reminiscent of Fontainebleau urns in drawings. Scrolling Janus heads (or satyrs) flank each window, and are used as scrolls. The central tympanum above the door also depicts satyrs in an ecstatic dance.



*Fig. 51 Hôtel Molinier, façade detail*

The interior of the house offers further connections to the Loire valley humanist culture diffused through France: Molinier's devise *sustine et abstine* appears in the *rez de chaussée*, along with an image of Hercule Gaulois, heads of Roman emperors, enchained figures, masks, armor, garlands,

tendrils, volutes, and further inscriptions, etc.<sup>273</sup> Clearly Molinier was steeped in the humanist culture of the period. I will examine this further below.

In the fifteenth century, the land now occupied by the Hôtel de Bagis was comprised of five distinct parcels, which were connected upon Jean Bagis's purchase of the properties in 1535. Nicolas Bachelier (1500-1577) was contracted on March 3, 1537 to construct a building that was oriented around a central axis. This original structure would have had three levels with windows with "pilasters and small columns on two registers, separated by a transom treated as an architrave (a motif that became a feature of Toulouse architecture) and an elaborately carved portal supported by herms in the manner of Michelangelo."<sup>274</sup> These figures would have probably been very similar to the atlantid figures in the cour d'honneur of the Hôtel Berenguier Maynier.

The Hôtel de Bagis did not take on its form known to us today until the early seventeenth century. (Fig. 52) With the death of interim owner, Nicolas Guerrier in 1606, the property passed into the hands of his daughter, Gabrielle de Guerrier. Gabrielle was married to the Parlementaire, François de Clary. Most of the documentation about the renovations of this structure describes François de Clary's involvement in the design process. And yet, even though Papillaut himself writes about the history of the property through the ownership of François, it is in fact Gabrielle who regularly signed the documents that he cites. This poses an interesting problem: to what degree did Gabrielle have a hand in the formation of this structure? There is a possibility for further research on female patronage here.

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<sup>273</sup> Mesplé, 57.

<sup>274</sup> Bruno Tollon. "Bachelier, Nicolas." In *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T005560> (accessed October 8, 2010). Nicolas Bachelier is a difficult artist to research, as there is much myth to separate from fiction. The standard work is H. Graillot: *Nicolas Bachelier: Imagier et maçon de Toulouse au XVIe siècle* (Toulouse, 1914).





*Fig. 52 Hôtel de Bagis, Toulouse, France, seventeenth century façade*

In the meantime, I will elaborate on renovations and the façade itself. A contract from 1608 signed between Gabrielle and Jean Bordes stipulated a tower and a wall for the barnyard. This seems peculiarly late for a tower, especially considering that only three years later the façade was redesigned in a manner highly unique to the city of Toulouse. The contract for this construction again was between Gabrielle and Jean Bordes. But it was a year later that the actual sculptural program was commissioned, following the designs of Pierre Souffron, and executed by the sculptor Pierre Boue. Progress must have been interrupted during this time, though it is not clear why, because on February 12, 1611, two capitouls went to the house to verify that the façade would not be inappropriate for the city, and later that year, October 31, Guillaume

Baudier and Pierre Monge were contracted to finish the façade project.<sup>275</sup> Nonetheless, the façade was not entirely finished until Calvet-Bresson had the work completed in 1857.<sup>276</sup>

Du Mège contended that the façade was designed not only by Souffron, but also by Nicolas Bachelier's son, Dominique.<sup>277</sup> He went on to write that students of Bachelier senior, d'Arthus and de Guépin, were responsible for the carvings of the main figures on the façade, which he identified as Mercury and Apollo, and Juno and Pallas.<sup>278</sup> Currently I have found documentation neither to support nor to discount this.

The façade as it appears today is not only unique for its materials but also for its iconography. Art historians have often stated that grotesques essentially become less ubiquitous in the seventeenth century and yet this urban mansion provides solid proof that grotesque imagery still resonated. Moreover, the grotesques here follow the model of the emphatic Fontainebleau type, with bodies and fruits sculpted in high relief. However they are grouped in denser configurations and the figures have the more robust physicality commensurate with the aesthetic turn at the beginning of the seventeenth century. (Fig. 53)

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<sup>275</sup> Papillaut, 164. See also Eclache, Michèle. *Demeures toulousaines du XVIIe siècle: sources d'archives, (1600-1630 environ)*. Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2006.

<sup>276</sup> Tollon, Bruno "Hôtels de Toulouse" *Congrès archéologique de France. 154<sup>e</sup> session. Monuments en Toulousain et Comminges*. 1996. Société Française d'Archéologie, Paris, 2002. pp. 303-310.

<sup>277</sup> Du Mège, Alexandre. *Histoire des institutions religieuses, politiques, judiciaires et littéraires de la ville de Toulouse*. Toulouse: Laurent Chapelle, 1844. p. 475.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.





*Fig. 53 Hôtel de Bagis, detail*

Consisting of eight bays separated by giant fluted pilasters in the Corinthian order, the façade contains a number of ornate details. The main central entrance has a pair of double Ionic columns on each side and a single Ionic column separating the doors. A broken entablature springs forth from these, projecting dramatically into the street. The recession and thrust of the pilasters along the surface is interspersed with globular masses of ornaments: shields, fruits, cuirasses, and metamorphosing animals, which are all embedded on the surface of the pilasters. The lintels over the windows are likewise arrayed with a variety of Janus heads, eagles and strapwork; those on the uppermost register consist of cabochons nestled within strapwork frames and Janus or Glaucus figures. At the top of the structure a projecting cornice dominates the street

and is further surmounted by alternately rounded and squared pediments. In the mullions of the windows on the second story, human figures metamorphose into various fantastic architectural members. The whole of the composition is a play of shadow and light, and provides a chiaroscuro façade unique within the cityscape.

Each of these houses, which are all located in the triangle formed by the area between Notre Dame de la Dalbade, the cathedral of St. Etienne, and the Parlement itself, provide examples of the vast production of ornamented facades in Toulouse. They contrast markedly with the often Gothic or Italianate mansions of the capitouls, and correspond strongly to tastes emanating from the court. To understand how these structures communicated messages of aspiration and allegiance in a metaphorical way, we must examine the larger history of Toulouse to grapple with their contextual references.

## **5.4 Mining the Past**

Tolosa was the Roman name for the Celtic Gallic city along the Garonne River that allied with the Roman Empire in the first century BCE. The city would have had the requisite temples, amphitheaters and cardo and decumanus organizing its urban formation. During the fifth and sixth centuries, Toulouse was the capital of the Visigothic kingdom. Both of these cultures left the region with a history of brick use in construction, and they also supplied Renaissance humanists with a number of local legends. Later, during the Middle Ages, Toulouse was also base to the powerful Counts of Toulouse and played a pivotal role in European politics for centuries.

Despite Toulouse's quest to portray itself as a republic à l'antique, many of the city's true Roman remains were no more. On occasion during the early modern era, some ruins were revealed, but "temps ordinaire le passé antique de la ville semble aboli, au grand regret de ses habitants férues d'archéologie."<sup>279</sup> Jean François de Montégut claimed that Toulouse was one of the oldest cities in the world, but that traces of its "origine se perd dans la nuit des temps."<sup>280</sup> He went on to lament "Peut-on voir sans étonnement qu'une ville aussi célèbre ait conservé si peu de monuments de son ancienne splendeur?"<sup>281</sup> And Tollon has similarly noted, "à la différence de beaucoup d'autres métropoles antiques, les grands monuments publics de l'époque impériale n'ont pas laissé leur empreinte sur l'urbanisme médiéval. Si le théâtre a pu être localisé avec certitude, ce n'est pas le cas pour le Capitole: ni l'un ni l'autre n'ont infléchi les rues médiévales ou maintenu une trace de leur présence sous la forme de place publique."<sup>282</sup> Nonetheless, the Roman city wall continued to set the boundaries of the city, reconstructed in 1345 and entirely restored in the sixteenth century. Aspects of the ancient Roman layout continued to inform rue Saint-Rome and Rue des Changes along with the rue du Salin to Saint Sernin, followed the Cardo Maximus of the city and served as the economic heart. It was also where the Bourse des Marchands was opened in 1549.<sup>283</sup>

Schneider writes "as many humanists increasingly spoke of the French monarchy and state as equal to the nations and empires of antiquity, so did local scholars unofficially see their city in similarly elevated terms. For them, Toulouse was not simply a large, wealthy city; it was a

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<sup>279</sup> Taillefer, 14.

<sup>280</sup> Montégut, Jean-François de. *Recherches sur les antiquités de Toulouse*. Paris: INHA, 2005. 1777 edition accessed digitally via INHA. p.5.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Institut français, 22.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 26.

municipal republic."<sup>284</sup> And while this certainly wasn't so, municipal authorities, writers, and artists took advantage of the sentiment and created a tone of Republican glory for the city. There was a continual effort by capitouls and humanists alike to mythologize and maintain an antique founding for the city as well as a deep alliance with Roman ideals, through law or literature, in essence the promulgation of an intense civic humanism. The Annales of the Capitouls of 1544 record this sentiment:

d'autant que la republique th[o]l[os]aine est estimée de non moindre dignité que celle des Romains, laquelle de bien petite par bon conseil des anciens devint dominatrice de beaucoup de provinces tellement qu'elle fut appelée le chief du monde, ay bien voulu essayer si en quelque endroit me seroit possible faire chose que redondast à l'honneur et accroissement de l'auctorité d'icelle republique tholosaine.<sup>285</sup>

Furthermore, ancient sources were routinely regarded for what they could provide for the governance of the city. The capitouls were direct in their references to these sources. The Annales of 1547-48 note simply, "nous baillent vive memoire et parfaicte souvenance de l'Anticquité par lesquelles cognoistrons l'ordre et maniere de bien regir et gouverner le pays, la cité, le bien publicque et ceulx qui nous sont donnez en gouvernement".<sup>286</sup>

The Capitouls also had a particular vision of how architecture should be produced for the city. This more conservative group looked to the building of fifteenth century Italy for models, and antiquity for foundations. The Annales of 1549, echo the Horatian rhetoric of monstrous bodies:

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<sup>284</sup> Schneider, *Public Life*, 59.

<sup>285</sup> BB 274, chronique 221, 1544-1545, p.69. Accessed through Archives Municipales de Toulouse [http://www.archives.mairie-toulouse.fr/tresors/annales/trans\\_livre2/221\\_1544.htm](http://www.archives.mairie-toulouse.fr/tresors/annales/trans_livre2/221_1544.htm)

<sup>286</sup> BB 274, chronique 224, 1547-1548, p. 89.

Au surplus, avant que nous venons à la recitation des nouveaulx edifices ou vieulx réparés par commandement desdictz seigneurs, fault presupposer ce que dict Vitruve en son livre d'Architecture et Baptiste Leon, florentin, en son livre des Edifices, c'est que uniformité, symetrie et deue proportion rendent les choses delectables à veoir et decorent tout artifice humain. Sy nous regardons ung poulet ayant deux testes ou un aigneau ayant cinq piedz ou quelque autre beste monstrueuse et diforme, l'aspect d'icelle nous faict horreur, et à l'opposite sy nous regardons ung corps de homme, femme ou beste bien symmetrié et proportionné, nous prenons à les veoir delectation.<sup>287</sup>

Here the Capitouls assert that before any new building or restauration of old structures, aspects of decorum garnered through the writings of Alberti and Vitruvius must be revisited, and from these texts, the qualities of consistency, symmetry and proper proportions emerge as standards. To disregard these is to devolve into monstrous forms, here again using the combinatory fallacies of animals malformed, instead of following dictates resulting in an optimal composition.

Papillaut writes that "Les traits d'architecture d'Alberti et Vitruve, qui reviennent si souvent dans les Annales Capitulaires, sont les systèmes de reference qui gouvernent le retour vers le sens antique de l'architecture particulière et publique."<sup>288</sup> And yet the architecture and ornament that was actually constructed presents a vastly more varied picture than what is suggested here. Clearly architects in Toulouse were considering the works of the Loire valley along with examples of the most prominence from Italy, Michelangelo and Romano to name a few. Moreover the license with which artists working in Toulouse took in creating dramatic ornamental programs is further evidence of the sixteenth century reaction to the conservative dictates of Vitruvius and Alberti.

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<sup>287</sup> BB 274, chronique 226, 1549-1550, p. 118.

<sup>288</sup> Papillaut, 90.

The Annales in fact reveal a more complicated picture. Vitruvius and Alberti are not used in a stringent way, but rather in a mode that suggests a mytho-poetic reading of these texts. For instance, in one such passage, it is not built form that is appropriated from these authors but rather their explanations of natural processes. The capitouls used these as metaphors for the forces of governance, conflating town oversight, architecture and nature into one whole:

Les puyz aussi sont profondz et comme dit Vitruve et Baptiste Leon en leurs livres d'architecture et art edificatoire, le puyz et la fontaine ne sont differantz fors que l'ung, c'est la fontaine, gecte sa source jusques à la haulteur et superficie de la terre et le puyz la gecte bas. Semblablement la congnoissance de civile institution est une chose profonde voire presque ung abisme.<sup>289</sup>

And yet the structures themselves were much more standard in type, often orchestrated along an axis, with forecourt (cour d'honneur) followed by living quarters and so on. It was in the façades and interior embellishments that artists and architects took these liberties. It is no coincidence that it was these spaces that were so public. This may be an example of what Charles Burroughs calls the “tension between particularity and universalism” being played out through the development of façade compositions. This entails two different conceptions: one of the building (drawing from Alberti’s body metaphor) and the other, the façade. He writes that this tension “dislocated” the metaphor of the building as body, and that the façade “resisted incorporation into the ‘body’ of the building.”<sup>290</sup> While it was clearly important, to harness the city’s aesthetic goals to those more well-established, the evidence on the ground suggests a much more emphatic exposure to and adaptation of new decorative forms. The proliferation of the grotesque in architectural ornament in the city was a dominant phenomenon, and many of the major houses of

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<sup>289</sup> BB 274, chronique 216, 1539-1540.

<sup>290</sup> Burroughs, 1993, p. 7.

elite families used variations of this element. The experimentation with grotesques further displays the broad flexibility that the motif could have, and clearly allowed artists to express the aspirations of their clients in unique and artful ways. Toulouse's hôtels demonstrate how local architects grappled with the idealized architecture of inherited texts with the realities of space and demand. The ornament of the facades reinforces what Serlio by mid-century had acknowledged: that demand for elaborate modes of display trumped the formulas of fifteenth century practice. Burroughs notes that Serlio, "excuses his own departure from orthodoxy in response to the demand for the display of escutcheons, emblems, and other markers of social distinction."<sup>291</sup>

Magnificence was at the heart of concerns over the urban image, and not only did the capitouls excavate ancient texts from Aristotle and Cicero, "Magnificence est vertu propre et convenable à princes ou administrateurs de republicques" but they also looked to Italian precedents.<sup>292</sup> Schneider writes, "the capitouls strove to beautify their town, taking as their model none other than the quintessential Renaissance city, Florence."<sup>293</sup> Evidence of this is offered in the Annales,

En certaines villes d'Ytallie, par statuz municipaulx les maisons des citoyens sont toutes d'une haulteur et n'est l'une plus basse ne plus haulte que l'autre, ce que rend les rues plus pompeuses, belles et delectables, car la uniformité des edifices decore les citez. Et entre autres ce que dessus est plus observé à Florence, pour raison de quoy entre toutes les citez d'Ytallie Florence a esté appelé « la belle.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Burroughs, 1993, 13. See his note 17 (page 13), and his reference to the "social matrix".

<sup>292</sup> BB 274, Chronique 225, 1548-1549, p. 104-5.

<sup>293</sup> Schneider, *Public Life*, 65.

<sup>294</sup> BB 274, Chronique 225, 1549-1550, p. 119.

Schneider suggests that this is evidence of a desire in Toulouse to move beyond the city's Gothic past, and yet Gothic construction continued in the city. Immediately following the invocation of Florentine prototypes, the *Annales* point out their own august edifices, and decry not the Gothic style, but the broad swathes of empty spaces around them. They clearly want houses that match the grandeur of the city's monuments. This is clearly part of the capitouls' remit, to prescribe remedies for the city's infrastructure. The capitouls were responsible for much of the rebuilding of the city, through repairing bridges, wells, the Hotel de Ville, and by erecting fountains and widening thoroughfares. They moreover took a greater initiative in prescribing public behaviors, and cracked down on all those violating the consensus, from thieves to blasphemers.<sup>295</sup>

Changing tastes were certainly a factor in the decoration of hôtel facades, but geographic considerations also played a role in the dissemination of new styles. Sitting at a crossroads of Spanish, French and Italian trade, Toulouse benefitted from wide exposure to artistic tastes. Furthermore, not only did Toulouse's elite serve as a ready body of patrons for work, but Marguerite de Navarre's court in nearby Pau attracted artists to the region, as well as renovations in the cathedral at Albi. The origins of a hotel's owners could correspond to certain architectural details, for example in the use of Spanish referents in the Hôtel de Burney. The local court culture at Pau, and Toulouse's own long heritage of erudition stimulated the circulation of treatises and texts.

These developments extended to the other arts in Toulouse as well. With the introduction of French in the mid-fifteenth century (Toulousains up this time spoke Occitan), in 1513 the Floral games, a major poetry contest held annually in the city, decreed French its language.

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<sup>295</sup> Schneider, *Public Life*, 68.



Nonetheless, Schneider points out that the first French poem written by an inhabitant of the city didn't appear until 1533. Occitan itself went through a major revival in the sixteenth century in the city, paralleling the development of French.<sup>296</sup> While the floral games were criticized by Joachim du Bellay in 1554, Ronsard was later honoured at the Floral Games, as evidence of Toulouse's deference to court tastes.<sup>297</sup> This is further evidence of the ever-greater orientation towards the French court, and away from local, autonomous modes of artistic production.

Language, literature, and in turn, decoration took on the superlative aesthetics of Fontainebleau's culture. Toulouse's Parlementaires were at the vanguard of this adaptation. Just as the poetry of the city adopted court tastes, the contested space of the façade began to absorb the imagery of royal grotesques. As the Parlementaires bought up the hôtels of the Capitouls, they emboldened the facades of these structures with imagery that directly alluded to the court.

The historiography of Toulouse's architectural heritage is a constant negotiation of possible regional influences. Pérouse de Montclos points out that the châteaux around the Loire Valley were stylistically influential and that it was local aristocrats who were the ones who were in charge of diffusing a court style out to their respective provinces. He notes particularly chateaux at Assier, Bonnavet, and La Rochefoucauld, all of which contain elements such as those found at Blois and Chambord.<sup>298</sup> There were also Bolognese artists at Albi, which coincides with Pérouse de Montclos's assertion that some decoration, such as that at the Hotel Bernuy could have been inspired by artists from Genoa or Lombardi, rather than from Burgos and Castille. Furthermore, Jean Guillame identified certain elements of the hotel Bernuy as being

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<sup>296</sup> Schneider, *Public Life*, 46.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 46-47.

<sup>298</sup> Erlande-Brandenburg, p. 87.

akin to ones to be found in Milan and Cremona.<sup>299</sup> But the Spanish plateresque style, a vegetal style of ornament significant to Burgos, Spain, is certainly present at the Hotel Bernuy, which strikes a careful resemblance to certain structures in Burgos, Toledo and Salamanca. This is a transitional style, combining the heavy articulation of the Spanish Gothic with aspects of the new classical vocabulary. However, this style is not found as ubiquitously in Toulouse as some research suggests. What does emerge in an inventory of the facades of the city's great hotel particuliers, is a combination of artistic influences, northern, southern, and antique. Mesplé has also suggested a stylistic connection between hotels of Toulouse and chateaux of the Loire valley.<sup>300</sup>

Clemence Paul-Duprat put forward the initial suggestions of a heavy Spanish influence in the architectural sculpture of Toulouse, but she also pointed out the influx of artists from the Loire Valley to work on the Chateau at Pau, as well as Marguerite de Navarre's prominence as a patron within the region.<sup>301</sup> This artistic output would have been aided by print culture, Martin's translation of Vitruvius, and the appearance of editions of Serlio. Scholars of Toulousain architecture have perhaps overlooked the influence of Marguerite's patronage through the region, as her court would have attracted artists and craftsmen from far and wide, and once the work was completed they could have stayed on or wandered from place to place as commissions arose. This raises the question as to how prevalent artists' studios were in the south of France. What is clear, however, is that the facades of these hôtels incorporated aspects of the householders'

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<sup>299</sup> Quoted in Tollon, "Toulouse ville "plateresque"? Note sur le problème des échanges artistiques avec l'Espagne au XVIe siècle" in Körner, Karl-Hermann, and Marc Vitse. *Las Influencias mutuas entre España y Europa a partir del siglo XVI*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1988. p. 143.

<sup>300</sup> Mesplé, 34.

<sup>301</sup> Paul-Duprat, Clemence. "Toulouse ville plateresque? Note sur le problème des Échanges artistiques avec l'Espagne au 16e siècle" *Wolfenbütteler Forschungen*. Vol. 39, 1998. p.139-152.

identity. These facades in turn changed as the ownership of the structure changed hands. If a capitoul's family was from Burgos, Spain, his house typically would have some Spanish influence, detectable perhaps in the tiniest of ornamental details. Their power was derived through their wealth, the success garnered often through the practices of trade, and hence their architecture reflected the multivalent referents of their livelihoods and their personal origins. For the Parlementaires, power was derived from the royal authorities of France, and their facades in turn reflect this relationship. External origins do not seem to have played as large a role in their imagery, and their facades seem to assert a particularly strong sense of French identity that went well beyond local designation. As the Parlementaires garnered a larger share of the power and wealth of Toulouse, the architectural character of the city grew to encompass the images of this power. The local elite of the capitouls gradually gave way to the aristocratic elite of the Parlementaires. Hence, as elsewhere, space was conceived in a way to emphasize this newly enlarged elite. The space of the façade carved out a visual space within the street to demonstrate this authority.

For artists working in Toulouse in the sixteenth century there would have been a number of precedents for the use of the grotesque motif. Julien traces the first use to St. Sernin cathedral, where Jean Dubois was commissioned in 1518 to create a doorway into the crypt that included grotesque ornament on the sides, and was topped with an image of Christ.<sup>302</sup> (Fig. 54)

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<sup>302</sup> Julien, Pascal. *D'ors et de prières: art et dévotions à Saint-Sernin de Toulouse XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*. Aix-de-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2004. p. 52.



*Fig. 54 Jean Dubois, crypt gate, St. Sernin cathedral, 1518*

Later in 1530-1534, a triumphal arch was erected in front of St. Sernin opposite the porte Miègeville by Jean Barbier and an unknown sculptor.<sup>303</sup> Julien sees a particularly strong influence from the St. Sernin grotesques on the ornaments used around the windows at Berenguier-Maynier. Julien puts these at around 1515, and writes

on retrouve sur les fenêtres arrière, sur les cheminées et sur les portes palières, des pilastres ornées dans memes grotesques qu'à Saint-Sernin, avec des chapiteaux très semblables ou des griffons identiques. Cet hôtel et le portail de Saint-Sernin forment un ensemble coherent, tant dans le dessin que dans la manière.<sup>304</sup>

He stops short however of ascribing the grotesques at Berenguier-Maynier to Dubois. Does this then suggest that there were other artists active in Toulouse who were developing and

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

disseminating this aesthetic? More importantly, it highlights the fact that in addition to the classical references and to Italian precedents that the sculptors of the *hôtel particuliers* under consideration here, Berenguier-Maynier, Molinier, and Bagis, may have also been appropriating the motif from local sources. The ways in which these sculptors may have negotiated these myriad influences will be discussed below.

## 5.5 Material Controversies

On the effects of the 1463 fire, Germain de Lafaille noted in 1687 in his *Annales de la ville de Toulouse*, “le plus embrasement que Toulouse ait jamais connu...fut de quelque avantage pour cette ville, parce que les maisons y furent rebâties avec plus de symétrie et plus d’agrément qu’elles n’étaient auparavant.” Until the late fifteenth century, the majority of structures in Toulouse were constructed of wood. After the fire, rebuilding utilized local sources to make the brick that had been used on many of the city’s medieval monuments. Brick was introduced as a building material by the Romans in the first century BCE, and was used steadily as a material on account of a prevalence of clay in the region, and a conspicuous lack of hard building stone. Tollon offers some interesting statistics: in 1399, there were 99 fustiers (carpenters) listed in the fiscal record amongst 180 people engaged in the building profession. Furthermore, there were only 13 masons and stonecutters and three brickworkers. In 1542, well after the fire and in the midst of the city’s building boom, there were 42 masons listed, though Tollon does not list a figure for brickworkers, and judicial records confirm 50 masons in the city between 1557-

1562.<sup>305</sup> After 1528 builders were obligated to follow set dimensions for the use of brick and an ordinance of 1550 further stipulated that all new building must use brick or stone on pain of fine of 500 livres and forbiddance of further work in the city.<sup>306</sup> Half-timbered houses continued to exist in the older parts of the city that had been untouched by the fire, and these nonetheless perpetuated certain customs of building practice.

Abraham Golnitz commented in 1631 “Les maisons meme des riches sont en briques, elles sont plus intéressantes par leur antiquité que par leur beauté.”<sup>307</sup> And also from 1638, Léon Godefroy, who was less enthusiastic, wrote about the streets including the rue de la Dalbade, “Les maisons n’y paraissent pas grandement, néanmoins celles des premiers et principaux de la ville ont leur beauté, tant à cause des matériaux desquels on se sert qui sont ou de la brique ou de la terre qu’à cause de leur bassesse n’y en rencontrant peu qu’ayent plus de deux étages.”<sup>308</sup> Opinions of the humble brick were divided: on the one hand they signalled the architecture of the past, Toulouse’s glorious antiquity when the building material of choice was brick, which was in evidence in the city’s archaeological record, versus its obvious earthiness, its lower load-bearing qualities, and its evidence of being hand-rendered. Significantly the vast majority of ornamental facades are rendered in stone and form a direct contrast to the brick walls that they usually face. The use of hard stones, as in the Hôtel Molinier, sets the façade further away from this local material, and highlights the householder’s ability to purchase and import costly goods. These

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<sup>305</sup> Institut français, 32.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 33. See the original text in Gölnitz, Abraham. *Abrah. GölnitzI, Dantisc. Vlysses Belgico-Gallicus, fidus tibi dux et Achates, per Belgium Hispan. Regnum Galliae, Ducat. Sabaudiae, Turinum usq[ue] PedemontI metropolin.* Lugduni Batav: Ex officina Elzeviriana, 1631.

<sup>308</sup> Institut français, 33.

additions also call to mind the new interest in collecting, especially of exotic stones, unique to an elite element of society.

Early in the sixteenth century, the new building activity also allowed wealthy residents to adopt new styles of architecture that reflected Toulouse's strategic location between Italy and the Atlantic, and an influence from Spain. One of the curious additions to the cityscape was the building of prominent staircase towers, many of which still exist. Thomson writes that many towers in European cities were being torn down at this time, and yet, Toulouse seems anomalous and anachronistic.<sup>309</sup>

Toulouse is one well-known example of a city, which prospered during the sixteenth century, and is well stocked with town houses boasting splendid staircase towers with belvedere cabinets on top. Such towers are always functional and integrated into the house plan, and never was a free-standing structure contemplated *à l'italienne*.<sup>310</sup>

These towers reflect the pretensions of the newly ennobled capitouls who sought to create vantage points in their houses. They demonstrate the larger desire for visibility in the Renaissance city, as described by Frommel in his *Palastbau*: buildings were meant not only to include views of distant prospects from the structure, but also needed to have a visual prominence within the city, as well as to be seen from afar.<sup>311</sup> This could perhaps be influenced by the Florentine connection, but these towers were also sites of innovative practices in staircase design. They also allowed for a playful visual effect within courtyards replete with grotesques,

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<sup>309</sup> Thomson, 175-180.

<sup>310</sup> Thomson, 179.

<sup>311</sup> Frommel, Christoph Luitpold. *Die römische Palastbau der Hochrenaissance*. Tübingen: E. Wasmuth, 1973. I, p. 14-24. See his description of *Visualisierungsprozess*.

for as at the Hotel Molinier, they provided a floating type structure that corroborated the fictional spaces often reproduced in grotesque prints. This play with weight and weightlessness was an important aspect of grotesque design by the mid-century.

Stone also provided an interesting foil to the prominent use of brickwork in the city, and it is not coincidental that grotesques were almost uniformly depicted on architectural facades in stonework. This provided a strong contrast to the red brick, as much of this stonework was light in coloration, ranging from white to cream. It would have been a conspicuous sign of wealth in the city, for one had to import the stone as well as find capable masons. The stone is also indicative of the broad influence that the Fontainebleau style had in Toulouse, through the appropriation of the ornate dormer type found on many French Renaissance chateaux here transmuted into elaborate entry portals and windows with atlantid (male caryatid) figures. Nicolas Bachelier, who designed some of these atlantids, was rumored to have worked with Michelangelo, and the relationship between the authority of this artist with the prominence of his materials could be connoted through the use of stone. Bachelier's stone figures have the material heft and brawn commensurate with Michelangelo's reform of the human figure.

During the seventeenth century there was a rumour that Clary was diverting stone from the Pont Neuf for his hotel, and hence the name 'Hotel de Pierre'. Mesplé later weighs in on the controversy of the use of stone, writing "l'opinion publique aurait vu d'un mauvais oeil que Clary ait construit son hotel avec des pierres destinées au pont," and suggests that the memory of this is conveyed through a saying in Toulouse, "Il y a plus de pierres du pont à l'Hôtel de Pierre que de pierres au pont."<sup>312</sup> The use stone of provoked an outcry from the populace and may

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<sup>312</sup> Mesplé, 54.



account for the reason that capitouls visited the construction site twice to make sure that the façade was keeping with the consensus of taste in the city. They may have made the visit to quell any possibility for demonstrations. The allocation of resources was of pivotal importance in the city during the early seventeenth century, especially as the economy contracted somewhat, and the general divide between rich and poor grew larger. Within the public discourse emerged a debate over the source of magnificence of a town. Was grandeur to be derived from the endeavors of the wealthy individual or through projects for the collective good? Only adding to this conundrum was the ever-increasing centralization of outside authorities, constraining local practices and traditions. The stone construction of the Hôtel Bagis façade was a visible reminder of these changes and it was clear that its authority rested in the governance and wealth manifest outside of Toulouse proper.

By the 1530s, local artist Bernard Nalot (c.1508-c.1550) had emerged as a notable talent amongst the artists of Toulouse. He came from a prominent family of stained glass painters in the city, and much of their work was tied to the capitouls.<sup>313</sup> In 1533 he was responsible for the ephemeral decorations for the entry of François Ier into the city, for which he was also tasked with presenting the keys of the city to the king. He worked on altarpieces at Nôtre Dame de la Dalbade alongside Nicolas Bachelier, and was one of several artists responsible for conceptualizing the Pont Neuf project in 1542.<sup>314</sup> Though in contracts he is often referred to as a painter, like most artists of the period his talents seem to have ranged across media. Named along with Antoine Olivier as “maistres pintres de tholose” in a 1536 contract with the Confrérie de Corps-Saints at St. Sernin, these artists were employed to paint a series of wall paintings to

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<sup>313</sup> Julien, 102-103.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

decorate the ceilings, walls and joints of the church's vaulted choir. With a Christ of the Apocalypse set against a field of gold presiding over the scene, Olivier and Nalot orchestrated a vast programme that included many grotesques. (Fig. 55) Olivier, like Nalot came from a local family of notable artists who likewise had worked closely with the capitouls, and Olivier himself was responsible for painting the 1529 *Annales*.<sup>315</sup>



Fig. 55 Olivier and Nalot, frescoes, St. Sernin choir, 1536

What is noteworthy with this example is that by the 1530s, local artists had had enough exposure and training in depicting grotesque imagery in Toulouse that they were being employed to do so on monumental projects. Moreover, they were exercising a precise transformation of that motif across media. Certainly Nalot and Olivier would have been aware of Jean Dubois's stone

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<sup>315</sup> Julien, 103.

grotesques just below the choir in the church's crypt as well as the monumental gate erected by Jean Barbier only two years before. Julien points out that for Nalot, for instance, to have been trusted by church authorities with such a request that he must have already been considered a master of this type of ornamentation.<sup>316</sup>

Moreover, even outside of artistic circles, the combinatory practices of grotesque production elsewhere seem to have been acknowledged in Toulouse. The *Annales* posit the story of Apelles using diverse parts to create the image of Venus as a practice for governance itself. As overseers of the city's infrastructure, it had a direct connection between governing and artistic techniques. The *Annales* records this sentiment in 1541, "Or est-il, bening lecteur, que quant au temps present ung second Appelles vouldroyt paindre aprez le vif l'ymaige d'ung bon capitoul et administrateur de republicque, quelz corps luy fauldroyt-il mectre au davant pour faire son pourtraict parfaict et consonant tant à sa dignité que charge?"<sup>317</sup> And yet, the capitouls were aware of the cautionary literature from Horace, et al. regarding the monstrosities possible through indecorous license. The *Annales* from 1543 decrees that the capitouls of that year

à compter depuis la restauration de l'humain lignaige n'ont pointé esté semblables au maulvays painctre duquel est faicte mention dessus, car entre le commencement et la fin de leur administration n'y a eu rien de difforme ou monstreulx, ains la fin a decoré et illustré le commencement. Ilz ont commencé bastir leur gouvernement sur bon et solide fondement et continué l'ediffice jusques à très heureuse perfection.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>317</sup> BB 274, Chronique 218, 1541-1542, p. 51.

<sup>318</sup> BB 274, chronique 219, 1542-1543, p. 57.

This is striking not only for how the capitouls position themselves as arbiters of sound and good taste within the city, but also how they use the languages of art and literature to support this placement. One may then infer that not only were artists traversing multiple media, but also they and their patrons alike combined cultural influences as well in a combinatory practice that is redolent with the larger spectrum of humanist endeavor at the mid-sixteenth century mark.

## 5.6 Texts and the City

What is certain about Toulouse is that in the mid-15th century the city benefited not only from the economic recovery that followed the hundred years war, but also from the pastel trade. This trade procured Toulouse's wealth and geographic primacy in the region, and it paved the way for a new generation of merchants and politically minded men to not only aggrandize themselves, but to beautify the city. Following the great fire and 1463, Toulouse was renewed on a scale of new ambition, one that bears resemblance to the emergent city planning that is now defined as Renaissance. It shouldn't be surprising that Toulouse participated in this sort of urban transformation, for it rivaled the other cities of France not only in its wealth, but in its geographical advantages, and its steadfast autonomy.

Schneider writes, "once installed in the city, this newly elite rapidly began to change the very shape of urban life. The most striking change was architectural."<sup>319</sup> He then goes on to deal with how the social character of these neighbourhoods was changing, particularly in the Dalbade.

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<sup>319</sup> Schneider, *Public Life*, 21.

With the emergence of this new elite, many in the city seemed to question how this impacted the old social order, seen especially in the establishment of sumptuary laws. For instance in 1550 the Parliament passed a law forbidding non-nobles from wearing silk. Schneider writes "but the tendency towards conspicuous consumption and extravagance was particularly great in a metropolis such as Toulouse, where newfound wealth promoted previously modest families into the ranks of the well-to-do."<sup>320</sup> But he goes on further to suggest that many of the pastel merchants had early been ennobled, and that the new variety of sumptuary laws seen at first glance as an insult by the Parliament, would perhaps not have affected the pasteliers directly. Nonetheless conspicuous forms of architecture continued to flourish within the city.

Within the strata of social positions from the most elite members amongst the parlementaires to the artisans well below them, rank and privilege riddled the sub hierarchies of each of these strata. Schneider documents "processions of a religious sort, corporations of artisans frequently carried the city's many holy relics. That was a burden, to be sure, especially since these objects of veneration were housed in heavy reliquaries of gold and silver, but it was an honor as well. Artisans were, in short, members of Toulouse's official community, worthy of handling the city's sacred treasure."<sup>321</sup> And Schneider further suggests the careful interweaving of economic interests between members of the different corporate bodies. Schneider thus writes "the atmosphere of Toulouse was thus conservative, aristocratic, enclosed, and not a little pretentious, with social relations limited by the strictures of privilege and corporate jealousy, and affirmed in the endless ceremonies that mark public life."<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid, 40.

All of the hotels maintain large walls that separate them from the street that can be accessed through monumental portals. This is where much of the exterior grotesque ornament is fitted, and while these features are used for their surface qualities of ornamental display they also reinforce medieval notions of separation, as Germain Lafaille noted in 1687, “ les maisons des gens de qualité et des personnes riches de ce temps-là étaient bâties à la manière de châteaux de la campagne, la plupart isolées avec créneaux et autres marques de seigneuries.”<sup>323</sup> One need only look to the heavy *créneaux* at the top of the entry portal of the Hôtel d’Assézat to see a very literal display of this sort of medieval feature. *Créneaux* here may also mean ‘gap’ and could refer to as well the very physical separation of house from the street by the *cour d’honneur* that was almost uniformly installed in these hôtels.

Jean Dubois, sculptor of the grotesques at St. Sernin in 1518 was originally from Mons in Hainaut, Belgium. Not only could he have brought the Northern tradition of grotesques disseminated through prints and tomb sculpture, but on his progress to Toulouse, may have seen other examples in building projects along the Loire Valley. Important sites of early adoption of the grotesque motif such as Gaillon were certainly within this range. And as with Nalot and Olivier later in the century, Dubois must have presented himself as a master of this motif to warrant a commission from church authorities. Julien points out that Dubois could have learned from sites along the Loire as well as Poitou, and that in Toulouse, he was described as “operatorem ymaginum” or worker of images.<sup>324</sup> This designation posits a tantalizing proposition: that being a ‘worker of images’ travelling so far afield from his home territory, Dubois must have carried examples of the kinds of work that he was skilful in producing. In this

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<sup>323</sup> Institute français, 39. See also Lafaille, *Annales de la ville de Toulouse*, 1687, Tome I, p. 227.

<sup>324</sup> Julien, 300.

vein, Dubois was a conduit for aesthetic ideas in Toulouse, and other local artists negotiation of the broad range of influences suggests how the production of grotesques here was also an example of their visual play.

Drawing from the grotesques of Dubois and from Barbier's arch, Nalot and Olivier were then tasked to paint images in the choir of St. Sernin, "entre les espaces de douze colonnes retorses seront peints les douze apôtres six de chascun côté vêtus de diverses couleurs en talc as requises et les enrichissements d'or et diadems, fait à la mode de Italie et encore mieulx si ce peut faire."<sup>325</sup> So not only did Nalot and Olivier have to synthesize the grotesques of Dubois, perhaps those at Albi, and to transform them from stone to paint, but they also have to surpass those of the Italians! But it is through the visual play with all of these confluent sources that grotesques in Toulouse were able to move beyond merely imitating Italian examples but to innovate on the form. To add extra nodes to this network, Julien notes that Nalot and Olivier would have also been privy to grotesques prepared for François Ier's entry in 1533, and that in the same year, Cosme and Charles Pignault illustrated the *Annales* with grotesques, and that these artists were in turn from Lyon.<sup>326</sup>

This ability to orchestrate and synthesize the vast wealth of grotesque meaning resulted in the acclamation of artists in Toulouse. Artistic innovation here dovetails with humanistic endeavor. Antoine Noguier immortalizes Nalot in his *Histoire de Toulouse*: "Pictura Nalotus erat praestantior omni/ Artifice, illustres qua redderet arte colores".<sup>327</sup> And as elsewhere, humanism

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<sup>325</sup> Julien, 118. n. 370. Areas painted with grotesques correspond to those areas stipulated in the contract as "à l'antique".

<sup>326</sup> Julien, 106. He suggests that the type of grotesques used in the *Annales* are in fact themselves directly from Lyon, but does not provide further evidence for this.

<sup>327</sup> Quoted in Julien, 102-103.

and the proliferation of the arts seemed to have emerged in tandem. On March 5, 1538, the humanist, prior and ambassador Jean Albert is recorded as being present for the signing of the contract between Jean Bagis, Antoine Lescalle and Nicolas Bachelier for the renovation to the Hôtel Bagis.<sup>328</sup> Bruno Tollon discusses how having Albert on hand for negotiations allowed the humanist to disseminate his knowledge of Serlio's text.<sup>329</sup> Furthermore, Albert could have offered his ideas on many of the types of decorative programs that he had seen first-hand on his trips to Italy. This could be seen perhaps in Bachelier's atlantid figures, still visible in the cour d'honneur that "derives de Raphaël, à travers le relais de gravures de Raimondi ou d'Agostino Musi, sont là pour affirmer l'importance du magistrat, propriétaire des lieux, et renvoient explicitement à sa culture de lettré."<sup>330</sup> The new aesthetic championed by Toulouse's elite reverberated across the arts, and was also contingent on a newfound antiquarianism. Frédérique Lemerle has documented the translations of Vitruvius in Toulouse and notes that at the same time that Jean Gardet and Dominique Bertin were exploring the antique ruins in and around Toulouse for their *L'Épitomé de Vitruve*, Antoine Noguier was writing about Nicolas Bachelier's oversight of the demolition of the Chateau Narbonnais (1549-1555), a building thought to have been constructed during Roman times.<sup>331</sup> Henri II sanctioned the demolition of the building in

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<sup>328</sup> Tollon, Bruno. "L'humanisme dans l'architecture toulousaine, Rencontres entre artistes et savants conseillers" in Dauvois, Nathalie. *L'humanisme à Toulouse: 1480-159 : actes du colloque international de Toulouse, mai 2004*. Paris: H. Champion, 2006. p. 411.

<sup>329</sup> Tollon, 2004, p. 411-13. See also Sabine Frommel. *Sebastiano Serlio, Architect de la Renaissance*. London: Phaidon, 2003. It is notable that the first volume of Serlio's text was produced in Latin, and that Albert would have been translating as well as sharing his thoughts on the text.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 413.

<sup>331</sup> Lemerle, Frédérique. "Architecture Antique et Humanisme. L'Histoire Tolosaine (1556) et L'Épitomé de Vitruve (1559)" in Dauvois, Nathalie. *L'humanisme à Toulouse: 1480-1596: actes du colloque international de Toulouse, mai 2004*. Paris: H. Champion, 2006. p. 426.



1549, and the project gave Bachelier the chance to explore the construction techniques of a building thought to be of Roman origin.

For artists and patrons alike, all of this activity manifested a negotiation between personal aspiration and public space, exercised through the site of the façade. A palette of references was available: regional, stylistic, antique or medieval. In addition to the grotesques of the city's facades, inscriptions were routinely employed to convey the voice of both owner and divine sanction. At the Hotel Berenguier Maynier, the atlantid figures alternate with texts that decry the motto and glory of the house's owner: above the door one finds *Vivitur ingenio cetera mortis erunt*, and weaving through the courtyard, *Togati Maynerii sedes lingua constructae florent*. At the nearby Hotel Tourneur, the owner directly confronted provocations of his enemies with *ESTO NICEII D[OMI]NI TVRRIS F[O]RTUDINIS A FACIE INIMICI*, where fortitude is expressed through both the character of the owner as well as through the structure itself. These inscriptions point to the outward proclamation of personal and social virtues and suggest the unique position that the hotel façade had within the cityscape. It is no coincidence that these texts appear in the same places as the grotesque decoration, for they were both employed to exalt the knowledge and social status of their patrons. By harnessing both the visual and textual languages of antiquity, Toulouse's elite was able to fashion a unique position both within the city and within the intellectual culture of the early modern era.

And finally it is necessary to point out that grotesques in Toulouse had fully moved into three dimensions, and that they were working to actively shape the experience of space. In prints of the period, portals, windows and frames are suggested in two-dimensional form, but in Toulouse, their use on entryways put this effect into practice. It is not surprising then that

staircases and towers likewise took on plastic effects. Through the unique combination of materials, regional and continental influences, and a burgeoning humanistic culture, artists in Toulouse were able to innovate on the grotesque form in wholly new ways.

## 6 Simon Vouet and the Interior Image

In 1643, Louis XIII died. His widow, Anne of Austria (1601- 1666) a Spanish Habsburg, found herself faced with a perilous political situation and a regency that her husband had not wanted her to have. With her retinue and children in tow, Anne fled the Louvre and settled in Richelieu's dispossessed palace, the Palais Cardinal. Now called the Palais Royal, in 1645 Anne commissioned one of the most important painters in France, Simon Vouet (1590-1649) to decorate a series of rooms in the palace. In the Queen's *Cabinet des Bains*, the painter created a collection of fifteen decorative panels, each depicting an assortment of grotesque figures painted in rich colors and set against flat gold backgrounds. This interior space would have been especially ornate with the grotesque panels spanning the full height of the room, from floor to ceiling. They were arranged directly next to each other, and would have presented a viewer with a jewel-box effect. Though they are now lost, the panels from the room were copied by Michel Dorigny and published in 1647 under the auspices of Vouet's workshop. This chapter will explore how these grotesques differ from those of the sixteenth century, and what they were meant to convey to their viewers. Vouet's work at the Palais Royal is important for a number of reasons. First, these paintings were commissioned by a Queen Regent, not for a king, and expose female agency and imaging during the period. Secondly, the paintings provide us with a conundrum: on the one hand their subject-matter, the grotesque, looks back to sixteenth century French art while simultaneously the way that Vouet painted his grotesques was startlingly new and set a fashion for interior decoration. Thirdly, the panel images were preserved in engravings by Michel Dorigny, and this tells us more about the influence of these grotesques through their

wide dissemination in copies. As with grotesques from other periods, Vouet's images contain elements that evoke his surroundings and the intellectual culture developing in mid-seventeenth century France.

The grotesques of the Cabinet des Bains follow a number of themes relevant to this study. First, they display qualities of appropriation. However, in this context, the grotesques reference antiquity less than they do the preceding century. The aspect of appropriation will trace the anachronistic qualities of these panels, with regard to their stylistic concerns and their referral to royal authority. The materiality of the grotesques corresponds to simultaneous developments: the reduction of grotesques to a strict two-dimensionality, and a deliberate siting of royal authority in specifically interior spaces. And finally, the quality of visual play will be discussed through the prism of contemporary fashion, particularly *ornement*, the idea of the fully decorated environment. *Ornement* is not far off from the idea of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, in that it attempts to create a total environment through decoration. In France, *ornement* is most associated with the monarchical and aristocratic households of this period. However, in France, unlike Germany, there was no conception at this time of a universal art, nor was the profession of architect dominating the production of interior schemes. France did have a long tradition of using rich interior environments, often with narrative or political intent. Debates about invention, genius and imagination concurrent with the emergent global culture of the seventeenth century coincide with this hyper-fashioning of interior spaces. Before these issues are treated, I will give an overview of the life of Vouet and the nature of the Cabinet des Bains commission.

By the time Simon Vouet painted grotesques for Anne of Austria at the Palais Royal in 1645, this mode of ornamentation had been a common element in decorative schemes in France

for well over a century. Deeply rooted within the common visual culture manifested through elite consumption, grotesques in this new political era of the seventeenth century would be used across the social spectrum. Grotesques produced at court were routinely copied and disseminated through prints. These prints then became the inspiration for objects and images produced for the consumption of the lower classes. Vouet's work is situated at the transition between the deaths of Richelieu and Louis XIII, in 1642 and 1643 respectively, and the political chaos during the years of the Fronde (1650-1653), which challenged the government of Cardinal Mazarin, Chief Finance Minister of France (in office 1642-1661), and the regent Anne of Austria (regency 1643-1651). The prints of his work, and those of his peers reflect these changing times, and existed within a print culture comprised not only of copious numbers of art and decorative images, but political and polemical tracts as well.

Noted for his decorative work, Vouet's voluptuous style intermingling ornament, color, and pearly skinned fleshy figures, would come to define one aesthetic trajectory through the remainder of the Bourbon dynasty. Blunt's reaction to Vouet was mostly negative, but even he had to concede that the artist's influence was profound, writing that Vouet's "most important innovations...lie in the field of decorative painting, in which he founded a tradition destined to dominate French painting for a century."<sup>332</sup> In the context of Vouet's work, grotesques represent the decorative aspect of his output upon his return to Paris. They are contingent on the alternative system of ornament that he created. This system has been neglected in favor of the new classicism in architecture of the period. Vouet's work runs as a dark-horse in a race postulated by modernist art historians who see the decade defined by the debates between the Rubenistes and

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<sup>332</sup> Blunt (1999), 158.

the Poussinistes, or who limit the conversation to the artistic output of the court under Louis XIV. In other words, Vouet's work has long been neglected largely because it does not fall into the categories associated with the narratives of the emergence of the French nation, or the progressivist art history that still dominates much scholarship. Vouet was in fact one of the most popular artists of his day, and ran one of the largest workshops in Paris. His clients represent a broad spectrum of the upper echelons of society: from wealthy members of the *noblesse de robe*, to the inner sanctum of the royal court. This chapter aims to demonstrate moreover, the palpable political content in Vouet's decorative program for the Palais Royal.

## 6.1 Paris to Rome to Paris

Like Poussin, Vouet spent many of his formative years in Rome, acquiring commissions and joining the international community of artists that flocked to the city.<sup>333</sup> Living in the parish of S. Lorenzo Lucina near S. Andrea delle Fratte and S. Maria del Popolo, Vouet's very existence during the Roman years was defined by these connections.<sup>334</sup> One of his patrons was none other than Cassiano dal Pozzo, the antiquarian and collector. The nature of his output was also marked by his focus on panel pictures and ecclesiastical commissions that stand in stark contrast to the predominance of hôtel interiors that he was called upon to design once Louis XIII

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<sup>333</sup> Vouet also spent time early on in Constantinople, and his connection there, and its possible influence particularly for his decorative work merits further exploration.

<sup>334</sup> Crelly, William R. *The Painting of Simon Vouet*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962. p. 7. Crelly notes that two of Vouet's most important paintings in Rome can still be seen in San Lorenzo in Lucina, his *Clothing* and *Temptation of St. Francis*.

recalled him to France. His early experiments in Caravaggisme combined with an interest in Venetian painting resulting in a style defined by its full-bodied stillness, elegant color and a flourish of sentimentalism, was generated through the now generalized mythologies and hagiographies that represented the limited span of decorous subjects under Counter-Reformation strictures. Vouet was no rebel, and his painting in both Italy and France represents a lack of interest in provocation, subversion, or real examination of content. This may also account for his general absence from Modernist accounts of the period, or his diminution as a mere painter of decoration. Instead, Vouet excelled at tweaking accepted conventions and developing new fashions in painting.

Vouet's life too forms a counter narrative to the development of the status of the artist during the century. His career, while wholly successful, does not have the glamorous sheen of the diplomatic career of Rubens, nor does it have the picaresque shade of Poussin, the aspirational social climbing of Velazquez, or the deep criminal realism of Caravaggio, one of his early influences. His career instead was marked by relative normalcy, born unto that generation that Jacques Thuillier has defined the "generation des aventuriers"<sup>335</sup> who appeared during the last days of the civil war, and whose earliest memories were marked by the grandiose building projects of Henri IV. Born in Paris in 1590, Vouet's father was as Jacques Thuillier points out "peintre de l'écurie du roi" and Vouet's grandfather was a *fauconnier* to the king.<sup>336</sup> Thuillier uses this to point out that Vouet's career was greatly enhanced by his family's proximity to the monarch, and yet Vouet never supposed his role was much greater than that of craftsman in

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<sup>335</sup> Thuillier, Jacques, Simon Vouet, Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée, and Denis Lavalley. *Vouet: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, 6 novembre 1990-11 février 1991*. Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990. 18.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, p. 19 The *fauconnier* was in charge of dressing falcons for the royal hunt.

service to the king. Thuillier writes that even after his talent was recognized and his patrons included leading families, the regent and the king, “il ne cherchera pas à être anobli; il ne songera pas à se remarier dans la noblesse, ni à donner ses filles à des personnes de qualité.”<sup>337</sup>

Vouet went to Rome in 1614 where he absorbed Caravaggisme, which can be seen especially in his genre painting, *The Fortune Teller* (Fig. 56) from 1618, and established himself within the artistic community of the city.



Fig. 56 Simon Vouet, *The Fortune Tellers*, 1618, oil on canvas

He produced a number of altarpieces and panel pictures during this time that had varying degrees of Baroque influences, that once he had moved away from the influence of Caravaggio, included the lessons of the Carracci, Lanfranco, and Reni.<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, he traveled around Italy to Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Bologna, and elsewhere. Along the way, he was absorbing lessons from

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> For Vouet's Roman years, see Crelly, Chapter 2 and Thuillier, 21-22.



currents in contemporary Italian painting, as well as from the numerous examples of northern painting in churches and collections across the peninsula.

In 1627, upon order of King Louis XIII, Vouet was recalled to Paris, where he would remain for the rest of his life. His oeuvre changed dramatically, for Parisian tastes were not as interested in Caravaggism anymore, and the vogue for panel painting was still in its infancy. The artist turned instead to decorative schemes for the chateaux and urban hôtels of the elite, and with it developed a particular decorative style that would impact French design for well over a century. These works anticipate the frothy lightness of Boucher, Fragonard, and certainly Watteau. Fumaroli notes that the tenebrism that Vouet acquired while in Rome was not adaptable to the Parisian scene. Instead Vouet developed what Fumaroli terms “la manière Claire”, inspired by Reni and Lanfranco, and “qui pouvait plus aisément se raccorder à la tradition bellifontaine et la revitaliser.”<sup>339</sup> He cites Vouet’s *Allegory of Wealth* (Fig. 57) as “témoigne de cet art lumineux de louange idéalisante qui fit de Vouet le rénovateur de la peinture parisienne.”<sup>340</sup> Vouet’s palette emerged from the dark grounds and reds and blacks of the Roman years, and turned to “blues and pale yellows, pinks and raspberry reds, pale greys and creamy whites” all of which grew richer over time, and further developed his masterful handling of tone.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Fumaroli, Marc. *L'école du silence: le sentiment des images au XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Flammarion, 1994. p. 408.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Merot, Alain, *French Painting in the Seventeenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 109



*Fig. 57 Simon Vouet, Allegory of Wealth, 1630-35, oil on canvas*

His pictures likewise took a compositional turn, becoming more compressed within the confines of the canvas, where forms are pressed further up to the picture plane. Each gesture, object, and body part has a distinctive volume and solidity in these images, and they are read almost as discrete symbols in an elaborate emblematic device. This lavish attention to individual components of his images, each stylized to fit within a rhetorical whole, can also be seen in his grotesques. One could argue that the pictorial means of grotesques, and those of narrative panel pictures merge most fully in the work of Vouet after 1627.

Once he returned to France, Vouet found a burgeoning nation not so different from what he had left ---a culture dominated by a centralized aristocracy that ruled a patchwork of classes,

headed especially by a radicalizing aristocratic contingent. By the time that Anne of Austria called upon Vouet to decorate her apartments in the newly acquired Palais Royal, suspicion of Anne and her right hand man, Cardinal Mazarin, had begun to reach a fever pitch. The decoration that Vouet produced was nothing shy of an attempt to establish a direct visual link to the art of sixteenth century, a continuum of rule and legitimacy. It also aimed to capitalize on the youthful influence of fashion, its persuasive, seductive qualities used increasingly in France to demonstrate and maintain political power.

## 6.2 The Commission

Anne of Austria seized the Palais Royal from Cardinal Richelieu's heirs in 1643, and quickly installed herself and the young Louis XIV in the new property.<sup>342</sup> Anne called upon Vouet to create interior decorations for several rooms, an order which is documented by two extant contracts and by the first hand account of Henri Sauval, recorded in the 1650s and published in 1724 as part of his *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de la ville de Paris*. Upon moving into the Palais Royal, only recently renovated by Lemercier, Anne had the chance to give expression to her own personal tastes. With the deaths of Richelieu, the former occupant of the Palais, and her own husband Louis XIII in the past year, Anne “put exprimer un goût

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<sup>342</sup> Anne also had a second son, Philippe of France (1640-1701) who later became the Duke of Orléans.

véritablement personnel”.<sup>343</sup> The contracts for Anne’s suite of apartments do not describe grotesques specifically, but they do display a profound interest in narratives of strong female figures and feminine virtues.

Vouet’s workshop was prolific in producing prints of his many commissions and the Palais Royal was an important source for such images. A set of fifteen prints, engraved and collected by Michel Dorigny in 1647, survives from the Cabinet des Bains. Vouet was required to paint essentially three sections for the Queen regent: *la galerie, l’oratoire and le grand cabinet*. The contracts for this suite were drawn up in 1645, the same year that work commenced. The grotesques were part of the programme, but while not specifically mentioned in the contract, do appear in the series of fifteen separate engravings by Michel Dorigny. These engravings became very influential, inspiring other interior decorative schemes as well as a variety of decorative objects, including timepieces.<sup>344</sup>

These prints depict robust grotesque designs set against white backgrounds. The figures appear languid and phlegmatic, intertwined with bushy, heavy hanging tendrils. Bodies metamorphose into creatures that appear at once aquatic (consistent with the theme of the baths) and disembodied. The myriad range of grotesque elements makes an appearance, effectively framing landscapes and other scenes on ovoid central panels. Crelly suggests that in the baths these grotesques would have been rendered in Vouet’s palette of bright, ice cream colors, and set

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<sup>343</sup> Mabile, Gerard. “Anne d’Autriche” in *Galeries nationales du Grand Palais (France). Un temps d’exubérance: les arts décoratifs sous Louis XIII et Anne d’Autriche: Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 9 avril-8 juillet 2002*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2002. p. 32.

<sup>344</sup> See especially Leopold, J. H., and Clare Vincent. “A Watch for Monsieur Hesselin”. *Metropolitan Museum Journal*. 28 (2003): 103-119. In addition to being a major patron of Vouet’s works, Hesselin and Vouet were extraordinarily close, with Hesselin even acting as godparent to Vouet’s child. For more on their relationship, see Schnapper, Antoine. *Curieux du Grand Siècle: collections et collectionneurs dans la France du XVIIe siècle*. Paris: Flammarion, 1994. Vol. II

against gold backgrounds, not so far off from the still extant decorations of the Hotel de l'Arsenal. (Fig. 58)<sup>345</sup> Situated within a complex of rooms that celebrated Anne's virtues as regent and mother, and creating a direct visual link to the regimes of her successors, Anne, possibly guided by Mazarin, fell upon an anachronistic array of decorative elements to display her royal power. This anachronism was at the center of the grotesque's operation in the seventeenth century, but it nonetheless infiltrated the discourse of modern painting.



*Fig. 58 Hôtel de l'Arsenal, interior*

The oratory was arrayed with classical elements such as festoons and putti, and a flourish of gilded finishes were added to the moldings, but compared to the other two spaces, it

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<sup>345</sup> Crelly, 108.

was left relatively minimal. For instance, the contract stipulates “Plus d’autres panneaux qui sont vides, dorer lesdits fonds d’or bruni, dans les panneaux y feindre un ornement d’or.”<sup>346</sup> And yet, some aspects of the overall design were left up to the artist or custom, “les lambris tout autour de ladite chambre seront les panneaux enrichis convenablement au plafond et les mouloures qui enferment lesdits panneaux seront dorées d’or bruni et les cadres seront compartis d’ornements convenables à ce que dessus.” The twice-referenced idea of the ornament being left up to what was *convenablement* suggests that Vouet was entrusted with what was considered decorous; he does seem to have been given some leeway in regard to the *ornement*. It also would have been possible for some grotesques to be part of this decoration, as they were being used as framing devices in numerous ecclesiastical contexts, particularly in oratories. Empty spaces were then covered with panel pictures that dealt with the life of the Virgin.<sup>347</sup>

On the programme for the queen’s bedchamber, the contract stipulated a central ceiling panel with Providence, Prudence with her children, and small painted landscapes. For the oval sections above doors, Vouet was given the choice of either acts of illustrious women or the theme of Prudence. Unfortunately, we cannot know which one he chose. Again, the contract leaves much to his discretion, in one area stating, “sera peint aussi par ledit Vouet ce qu’il sera jugé le mieux à propos pour accompagner les tableaux des Femmes illustres qui doivent être posés.”<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Weigert, Roger-Armand. “Deux marches passée par Simon Vouet pour les decorations de l’appartement d’Anne d’Autriche au Palais Royal (1645)” in *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire de l’Art français*, Année 1951 (1952). p. 101-105.

<sup>347</sup> Sauval, Henri. *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de la ville de Paris*. Paris: Chez C. Moette, 1724. Vol. II, 169.

<sup>348</sup> Weigert (1952).

The second contract stipulates the decoration for the Petite Galerie, and amongst many quite specific ornamental features, such as particular flowers to be portrayed, the central theme of the gallery was meant to reflect *Volonté*, *Intellect*, and *Mémoire*, each personified. *Volonté* for instance is to be portrayed as “une jeune fille couronnée, des ailes aux épaules, vêtue de couleur changeante pour marque de sa légèreté avec le bon et mauvais genie à ses côtés, témoignant par un globe du monde qui lui sera représenté par quelques amours qu’elle se tourne indifféremment vers le bien et la mal.”<sup>349</sup> *Intellect* is demonstrated by a young female figure, and *Mémoire* is shown as an aged woman, and all three combined assert themes relevant to Anne’s role as Regent. But while much of the decoration required for the gallery is quite specific, again Vouet had some leeway, and the language of decorous judgment is issued throughout, as long as it “serviront à exprimer davantage les sujets des tableaux.”

The two contracts are invaluable for what they tell us about the nature of patronage in France at this point, and they are also interesting for what they do not explicitly note. Many decorative features seem to have been left to the discretion of the designer, and where specific elements of decoration are elucidated, they tend to entail certain formulaic renderings that would have been nonverbally communicated through custom. This in short, had not really changed from the sixteenth century. And yet, in no place in the contracts do terms such as “caprice” or “chimerique” appear, terms which were very much a way that the grotesque was being described in other literature. Clearly, grotesques appeared in the Cabinet des Bains at the Palais Royal, for the engravings for these designs exist, and Sauval’s testimony describes them in detail. It may be that French theorists were not yet defining grotesques through these aspects, and that such

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<sup>349</sup> Weigert (1952), p. 104.

terminology was not developed until much later in the century. It could be that notions of capriciousness would have undermined the prerogative of royal authority. Since grotesques were not mentioned specifically, this implies that caprice was not part of the original intention of the programme.

While Sauval felt certain that the commission expressed Anne's personal taste,<sup>350</sup> it does not appear that she languished in a glorification of her own past. Mabilie observes that for all of the decorative projects created for her, these do not reflect her country of origin: Spain. He writes "Bien qu'espagnole de naissance, Anne d'Autriche ne chercha pas à implanter en France les traditions décoratives de sa patrie d'origine." Instead she aimed to "accorda volontiers une place de choix, dans les décors peints, à l'histoire religieuse ou aux allegories propres à célébrer les vertus qu'elle incarnait."<sup>351</sup> In short she aimed to embody qualities necessary for a queen-mother in France, demanding a programme to assure her courtiers that her oversight of the young king had the future of France at its heart. It is also interesting to note that throughout her reign, and through her various residences such as Fontainebleau and the Louvre, grotesques are known to have been a major feature in those decorative schemes. Anne never seemed to shy away from this mode of representation, and appears in fact to have embraced the late mannerism of the Second School of Fontainebleau, as well as the new classicism of Vouet and later Le Sueur.<sup>352</sup> Grotesques acted for Anne as an intermediary, used to frame the generic, feminine virtues that she hoped to espouse, without foisting her persona onto palace imagery. This suggests that she saw this as a proper way to balance the role of the regent, a surrogate for the true royal heir.

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<sup>350</sup> Sauval, 170.

<sup>351</sup> Mabilie, p. 34.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.



Unlike Catherine de' Medici who commissioned works extensively, Anne's projects tended more towards the temporary renovations appropriate to her role as regent. She only breached this when the narrative of royal legitimacy was at stake. This can be seen for instance in her commission for Val-de-Grace, the site where Louis XIV was conceived.

### 6.3 The Grotesques of the Cabinet des Bains

In 1890, Armand Guérinet published a folio of Dorigny's prints under the title *Livre de Diverses Grotesques Peintes*, that included the original frontispiece for Dorigny's collection, the frontispiece for works at Fontainebleau, all of the grotesques for the Cabinet des Bains, and a number of other copies of prints by artists such as della Bella and Watteau.<sup>353</sup> The references to individual prints will follow the image numbers that Guérinet devised for Vouët's grotesques. Unfortunately, there is no trace of titles for these works, nor do we know how they were arranged in the Cabinet des Bains. But there is enough extant information to cull some of the meaning of this commission.

All of the panels in the Cabinet would have had a similar orientation: each had three distinct registers comprised of three cartouches with different images. The cartouches on the top and bottom each depict some mythological figure. Especially prominent are couples, female deities and images of sacrifice. The middle register is most often taken up by a cartouche with an

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<sup>353</sup> Guérinet, Armand, and Michel Dorigny. *Livre de diverses grotesques peintes dans le cabinet et bains de la reine régente au Palais royal par Simon Vouët, et gravées par Michel Dorigny, 1647, à Paris, aux galeries du Louvre, avec privilège du roy*. Paris: s.n, 1890.

interior image depicting a tree set within a landscape. The three cartouches are then set within the larger image of the grotesque that is organized by streaming tendrils of various leaves and flowers realistically rendered, male and female figures such nymphs, satyrs, some harpies, and animals ranging from terrestrial creatures such as insects and dogs, to sea-dwelling entities such as lobsters, and airborne birds. Other recurring motifs include shells, weapons, musical instruments, censers, ribbons, and griffins' feet. These elements are arranged around and through the registers of each image in highly symmetrical formations. The top registers tend to be circular, the middle cartouches are largely octagonal, and the bottom registers are usually horizontally oriented rectangles, though there are several exceptions to these rules.

Michel Dorigny's prints announce to us, from the very first image on the frontispiece of this collection, the formal components of Vouet's work, composed of a sarcophagus inscription with a dedication to the regent's secretary, Monsieur Tubeuf. (Fig. 59) Starting in the top register, one finds a swirling assortment of standards, spears, arrows, and a ram head. Below this, two swelling putti appear, holding ribbons and garlands, framing a coat of arms and watched by two lion heads.



*Fig. 59 Michel Dorigny, frontispiece with dedication to Monsieur Tubeuf*

These figures are robust, and are contrived of dramatic chiaroscuro, and an undeniable three-dimensional quality that was unusual for the elongated, graceful figures common to French Mannerism. Throughout the collection of images, it is clear that Vouet had been inspired by his work in Rome during the early years of the century, for one sees a heavy influence of Reni, and Raphael by way of the Carracci.

Plate Three of the printed collection displays the features common to this particular series<sup>354</sup>. (Fig. 60) The uppermost cartouche has the low relief effect of a cameo and may represent the messenger Iris or Venus. The female figure is represented as fleet footed and carrying a torch, which suggests that it is more likely Iris. The middle cartouche is a framed, octagonal image of tower set within a rather wild, wind-swept cliff. The bottom register is comprised of a cartouche designed to look more like a frieze, due to its elongated rectangular orientation. The subject of this image appears to be Thaumás and Electra (an Oceanid) as he

<sup>354</sup> I am using Guérinet's designation Pl. 3.

carries her away on a litter drawn by horses. This interpretation would explain the inclusion of the harpies through the rest of the composition, as Thaumus and Electra's coupling resulted in the birth of both Iris and the Harpies. The uppermost image is presided on top by a bare-breasted harpy, with hindquarters metamorphosing into tendrils. At her base one finds a thick surround of blossoming flowers. The harpy's wings are spread, forming a symmetry that presides over the rest of the composition. Birds hold corners of garlands in their beaks, and just a little further down, there are insects drawn almost as if from nature: a beetle on the left and a butterfly or moth on the right that dangle from the hanging garlands. These garlands then cascade down, one on each side, ending just above putti seated on top of goats. The goats are arranged at angles situated around the first cameo-like cartouche. This vignette is framed by a band of oak leaves.



*Fig. 60 Dorigny, after Vouet, Plate Three*

Further on, the back hooves of these goats rest on curving arabesques that wind down to vases on each side, and that hold up the second cartouche. The cartouche rests on an urn with a bird with spread wings that double as handles. At each side of the urns appear two harpies again like the female figure that appears at the top with animal hindquarters and wings. These figures each face censers with wisps of smoke rising to meet the arabesques above them. The censers at their ends also have ribbons and from the ribbons hang oddly, lobsters, but as one looks around,

one sees that the next cartouche at the lobsters' sides depicts a watery scene with Thaumus (a sea-god) and Electra (an Oceanid). And so the lobsters denote the watery atmosphere of this bottom cartouche. This element rests on the side of the casket upheld by what appear as griffin or lions feet but that are metamorphosing into arabesque tendrils. Again there are more ribbons twirling in the air as if moved by a wind and yet another garland at the bottom of the panel. The panel presents chatter: the clapping of clothes, the clicking of shells, the lapping of water, in the service of the watery theme. But in the middle cartouche, a discrete landscape appears with a mass of vegetation; it seems to sit at the edge of a body of water. Its ruined tower pokes up through the foliage, and indicates to us that the intention of the piece is to suggest an arrival at a new land, for Anne of Austria having travelled from Spain. Would she have been sailing into Marseille? Perhaps this is the Augustan tower that dominates the cliff at Toulon. Brought to a foreign land to marry Louis XIII, it presents a parallel to Ruben's *Embarkation* for Marie de' Medici, the pre-ordained love of a monarch, and the distance over water travelled. But more likely, the tower recalls that of the ruined Benedictine abbey Val Profonde. Located near Bièvre le Chalet, the abbey was originally commissioned by Hugh Capet's son, Robert. This is significant because the Bourbon line traced their claim to the throne back to the descendants of Hugh Capet, and the Capetian dynasty. Anne bought the ground on which the ruined abbey stood and transferred architectural features to Val-de Grace. The queen then adopted this church as her spiritual home once in Paris. She contributed money for extensive restorations that included a suite of rooms for her personal use. She also commissioned a series of landscape paintings in 1652, from the painter Philippe de Champaigne.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> See Jennifer G. Germann. "The Val-de-Grâce as a Portrait of Anne of Austria: Queen, Queen Regent, Queen

Also of interest in these grotesques is the minute observations given to the insects and flowers that appear. Anthony Blunt asserted that the art of the seventeenth was influenced by the *Précieux* in their demand for depictions of flowers in imagery.<sup>356</sup> Some of the *précieux* imagery used oak leaves in particular, and they do occur as a common motif during this period.<sup>357</sup> Furthermore, this coincides with the founding of the Jardin des Plantes in 1626, which was opened to the public in 1640. Used largely for scientific investigation, the Jardin was originally meant to serve as a medicinal garden in the service of the king. Each of the grotesques in Dorigny's collection contained elements of nature finely observed. Together, these images serve as a rudimentary *Kunstkammer*, a collection of objects for study and pleasure.<sup>358</sup> Vouet's grotesques at the Palais Royal offer a proto-taxonomic system, with various elements relegated to discernible categories of objects.

Clearly, Vouet was adopting many of the grotesque's basic elements from the sixteenth century: the cartouches, metamorphosing bodies, varieties of plants and animals depicted in fictionalized spaces. However, he elaborates these in a mode commensurate with the emerging

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Mother" in Hills, Helen. *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. 47-62. and Mignot, Claude. *Le Val-de-Grâce: l'érmitage d'une reine*. Paris: Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites, 1994.

<sup>356</sup> A group of women authors and intellectuals who gathered regularly at the Marquise de Rambouillet's salon. The group included Madeleine de Scudery, author of many lengthy romantic novels. Research on this topic is quite vast. See especially: Craveri, Benedetta, and Teresa Waugh. *The Age of Conversation*. New York: New York Review Books, 2005. Beasley, Faith Evelyn. *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*. Aldershot: Ashgate Pub, 2006. Lougee, Carolyn C. *Le Paradis Des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976.

<sup>357</sup> Blunt, Anthony. *The Precieux and French Art*. [S.l.]: Nelson, 1950. Reprinted from Fritz Saxl 1890-1948. A volume of Memorial essays edited by D. J. Gordon. p. 326-338.

<sup>358</sup> There is enough evidence to supply a good study of the relevance of the emergence of scientific knowledge with the development of ornamental systems. On the *Kunstkammer*, see Bredekamp, Horst. *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine: The Kunstkammer and the Evolution of Nature, Art, and Technology*. Princeton: M. Wiener Publishers, 1995. Also Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta. *The Mastery of Nature: Aspects of Art, Science, and Humanism in the Renaissance*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993. See especially pages 174-194. For work on France especially, see Evans, Robert John Weston, and Alexander Marr (eds.) *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006. especially the Kenny and Marr essays.

aesthetic of seventeenth century France (and Italy) with robust figures, defined spaces between elements, and distinctive contours. He does not blur the boundaries between forms, and his compositions certainly had a clarity that lent a precision to his representation of objects. Mérot asserts that in the baths for Anne of Austria, Vouet and his collaborators created a space that was meant to be “légère, divertissante, subtilement païenne – en hommage à certains des plus fameux décors romains.”<sup>359</sup> But Mérot suggests that while Vouet was also heavily influenced by the works of the Galerie d’Ulysse at Fontainebleau, like Zerner<sup>360</sup>, he sees two separate developments that are part of Vouet’s work in the baths: the grotesque and the cartouche.<sup>361</sup> He writes that the cartouche was an import from the world of sculpture. However, the abundance of prints during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century that display cartouches cannot be avoided and it is the contention of this study that cartouches were considered only one of a number of elements that could be included in grotesque imagery well before the work of Vouet. In the Galerie d’Ulysse, the painted images displayed represent the void of the cartouche’s space, and would have been considered an integral part of the overall design, an element within the whole grotesque aesthetic that shaped that space and that would go on to be so influential in French art.

Furthermore, many of the images in these grotesques reference other sources. In plate fifteen (See Fig. 61), Vouet has created a work that digresses from his established format.

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<sup>359</sup> Mérot, Alain, “Simon Vouet et la grotesque: un langage ornemental” in Vouet, Simon, and Stéphane Loire. *Simon Vouet: actes du colloque international Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 5-6-7 février 1991. Rencontres de l’École du Louvre*. Paris: Documentation française, 1992. p. 565.

<sup>360</sup> Zerner, 138.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.





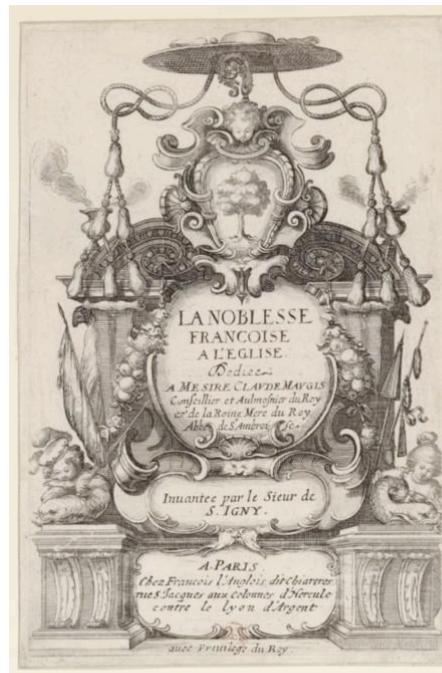
*Fig. 61 Dorigny, after Vouet, Plate 15*

The uppermost most cartouche now takes the octagon frame, but it is set within a strapwork matrix flanked by river gods and nymphs. The middle register is now taken up by two more of these figures, spilling a large vase of water. In the final register, Vouet depicted an ornamental rectangular frame with a central image that depicts the triumphal ride of Galatea. The Galatea image is a clear quotation of Raphael's Farnesina Galatea. The decoration of the Farnesina utilized a vast array of mythological subjects set within strictly controlled grotesque borders. But for Anne of Austria, Vouet improvised and created a set of grotesque images that fully integrate the pantheon of mythological deities desired by Anne. He creates a new form of pictorial space, where the boundaries of narrative, frame, wall, and object are compressed into a single image. For Vouet, the cartouche is as vital a component of this system, as the grotesque itself. They are

inseparable. Through creating these images, he was able to generate a number of associative meanings for the work—Fontainebleau, Farnesina, San Lorenzo, Blois, each of which contains some image that has been used and transformed at the Palais Royal. This operation would only work if there had already been a tradition in which artists used the cartouche and the grotesque as essential components to one another. The former is a frame, and the latter is the metamorphosis of form, but when combined they establish a conversation back and forth that is fundamental to grotesque imagery.

The most notable change to these grotesques is their volume. The lightness of the figures has given way to a heavy, fertile, saturated quality to the forms. The mannerist elongation of limbs has disappeared in favor of bodies that are chubby, rounded and soft. There is clearly a strong suggestion of the Rubenesque in these images, but they are also analogous with the greater emphasis on *gravitas* in seventeenth century French culture. Each element in the composition suggests an object in its totality, without the contingency that we find in grotesques of the sixteenth century. The backgrounds of these images are blank, showcasing only the objects, as if on display, rather than the pastiche of the sixteenth century, the revival of the tableau or assemblage. This is in a sense what makes these images more conservative, the reaction and ultimate referral to the medieval tableau vivant, and this is perhaps appropriate for a lineage that traced its legitimacy to the Louis IX.

One finds a new monumentality in the art of the seventeenth century. It hinges on a sense of heroism, grand scale, swelling of form, and a mastery of tone. It is visible not only in the works of Vouet, but also in Perrier, Le Brun, and even in some of the works of Bosse, such as his frontispiece for *Noblesse* (Fig. 62).



*Fig. 62 Abraham Bosse, frontispiece for Noblesse*

Moreover, artists were moving away from the emblematic quality of grotesques, and further into a three dimensional, naturalistic rendering of form to show the strength and profusion of the new era under Bourbon monarchs. Vouet's grotesques for Anne of Austria provide an uncomplicated assortment of figures and forms reinvented for the dictates and inspirations of the early seventeenth century, while simultaneously acquiescing to forms of nature. They provide verisimilitude in their studies of the antique form as well as individual elements, and yet combine these in imaginative and fantastic amalgamations.

As for the baths themselves, it is interesting to note that they recall the baths of Fontainebleau, likewise arrayed with grotesque decoration. Anne of Austria perhaps was seeking images that created a lineage to the Valois line. She additionally commissioned new baths at the Louvre. The copious watery figures and the scenes of love and coupledness recall the saucy

scenes at Fontainebleau. These images also have other derivatives. Plate Eight (Fig. 63) has two satyr figures supporting the octagonal central cartouche with a depiction of a tree. Though these satyrs do not have the virile, aggressive sexuality depicted in many prints of the sixteenth century they do symbolize a ribald humour: they rest on the lower cartouche in which a Triumph of Bacchus is depicted.



*Fig. 63 Dorigny, after Vouet, Plate 8*

Like the frescoes of Fontainebleau, such elements suggest that Anne did not anticipate one monolithic meaning to her decorations. As there are scenes of sacrifice and allusions to her role as mother, there are also these elements that suggest an alternative set of meanings. Vouet

previously depicted satyrs at the grotto that he designed for Claude de Bullion (1569-1640) *surintendant des finances* for Louis XIII. The grotto is a formal tripartite structure (Fig. 64) and is situated at the end of the garden of the Chateau de Wideville. Inside, the grotto is encrusted with stucco decoration undertaken by Jacques Sarrazin, and amongst other things, depicts the arms of Bullion and his wife amidst putti, banners, cartouches and an image of a nymph with a river god.<sup>362</sup> Male and female satyrs flank these figures and they are situated against a background “made up of gold cubes set into the white stucco in mosaic fashion.”<sup>363</sup> (Fig. 65) In the vault, an image of Parnassus looms over this ensemble. This example points out that Vouet was very aware not only of the vocabulary of Fontainebleau imagery, but was savvy enough to also draw a parallel between the grotto’s materiality and that of the grotesque halls at Fontainebleau. The interplay between two and three dimensions, and through the variety of materials---stucco, paint, gold tesserae, signals his reference to the luxury sites of the sixteenth century. The satyr furthermore summarizes the playful connection to the past, the informality of the garden space, and the nexus of meaning between grotto, grotesque and the metamorphosed body.

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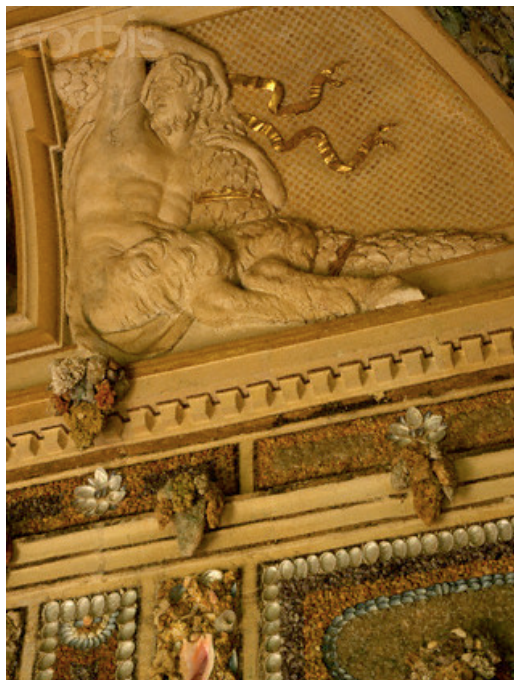
<sup>362</sup> Crelly, 106-108.

<sup>363</sup> Crelly, 108.





*Fig. 64 Grotto at Wideville*



*Fig. 65 Satyr figures in grotto at Wideville*

## 6.4 Appropriation and Anachronism

As regent, Anne of Austria found herself presiding over a court full of nobles jockeying for position. This striving was the great activity of the court, and whereas in the sixteenth century, the Valois found themselves pitted against the rival interests of the Princes of the Blood, the Bourbons faced two factions, the *noblesse de robe* and the *noblesse d'épée*. The former was seen as the nouveau riche, the up-and-comers, who threatened the inheritance and privileges of those latter nobles born from military service. And yet, recent examination of these groups has found that the lines between them were not as profound as previously believed. Marriage, economic ties, perhaps even the church bound these groups together. While there were a number of revolts led by members of the nobility well before the Fronde,<sup>364</sup> the general tenor of monarchical rule resulted in a system in which youth and personal ambition played a paramount role in social formation.<sup>365</sup> Ellery Schalk has argued for the growing interest in establishing rights and privileges through the tracing of lineages, and the establishment of one's noble line or *race* (lineage). Jonathan Dewald has in turn suggested that there was a greater emphasis on individual rights and personal ambitions as attested by the numerous letters that survive from the early century.<sup>366</sup> I argue that both of these facets occur in the seventeenth century, and that they directly effect the kinds of art and ornamentation commissioned. In the case of the Cabinet des Bains grotesques, it was both the category of grotesque imagery that heralded a royal lineage based on its abundant use in the sixteenth century, and in turn its antique past, as well as the

<sup>364</sup> Bonney, Richard. *Political Change in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin, 1624-1661*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. Bonney counts at least twenty conspiracies between 1602 and 1670. See p. 284.

<sup>365</sup> Dewald, Jonathan. *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>366</sup> See Dewald, op cit. Schalk, Ellery. *From Valor to Pedigree: Ideas of Nobility in France in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986.

formally inventive (and fashionable) technique of Vouet, that served his patron's personal ambitions well.

Simon Vouet provides a counterpoint to the emerging culture of seventeenth century academic painting. Positing an aesthetic alternative to the growing allure of panel painting in France, Vouet's work represents a multivalent link to the decorative programme of the sixteenth century. Weyl notes that French critics of the seventeenth century "saw their own period as one of great revival and, like the Italians, one of the reasons for this was an increase in learning, especially of the antique."<sup>367</sup> That Vouet's workshop flourished under the Bourbon regime also suggests that there was not a complete break with the visual culture of the past, and that although the influence of Poussin would guide the leadership of new art institutions, Vouet's *ornement* provided a subtext to this development. The continuing proliferation of Vouet's modes of interior decoration was promulgated not only through the tastes of aristocratic and bourgeois clients, but also through the practices of Vouet's many students that passed through his sizable workshop.

In the 1640s, we find competing claims for the representation of antiquity, and the work of Poussin and Vouet posit two of these positions, though they are not representative of the full spectrum of ideas. If we take Todd Olson's argument that that Poussin's collection and organization of antiquities for the Grande Galerie was responding to prevailing tastes, and was not an attempt to innovate, then we can explore this example for its relevance to Vouet's work at the Palais Royal. Olson writes, "when Poussin was enlisted to collect and organize antiquities for

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<sup>367</sup> Weyl, Martin. *Passion for Reason and Reason of Passion: Seventeenth-Century Art and Theory in France, 1648-1683*. Hermeneutics of art, v. 2. New York: P. Lang, 1989. p. 76. This may be in part due to the greater access to education as well, see Huppert, George. *Public Schools in Renaissance France*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984.



the Grande Galerie, the monarch was obtaining not the profuse spolia of imperial conquest but rather the means to claim antiquarian authority.”<sup>368</sup> This viewpoint has been suggested by other scholars including Peter N. Miller and Hetty Joyce, and has been applied to the collecting activities of France’s elite as a whole. One could argue that this was a process well under way, for François Ier had also commissioned casts and copies to be made when originals were not available.<sup>369</sup> Vouet was also doing something very similar, in that his art was meant to claim royal authority but in a very different vein. His work called upon the aesthetics of the previous royal house, using grotesques in particular, which were heavily associated with the building programmes of the Valois. He in turn infused these images with a new vitality, placing them against rich gold backgrounds and arraying them with profuse color, and minutely observed details. Essentially, he took a motif that already had antique references, and retooled it in order to also stake a claim to royal legitimacy not just to ancient authority, but through the Valois line as well. Therefore, his work references more than one or even two temporal centers; it looks to the antique, to the frenzied moments of the grotesque’s discovery in Renaissance Rome, and to the assumption of royal authority under François Ier. By using novel formal elements, Vouet then positioned these images within larger schemes that asserted royal power in the contemporary moment. What is unusual is that he also produced similar decorative programmes for other households, but which nonetheless convey systems of authority through multiple temporal references.

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<sup>368</sup> Olson, Todd. *Poussin and France: Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. P. 12.

<sup>369</sup> Olson is alluding to the emergent République des Lettres. See Miller, Peter N. *Peiresc’s Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. Joyce, Hetty. 1992. “Grasping at Shadows: Ancient Paintings in Renaissance and Baroque Rome”. *Art Bulletin*. 74, no. 2: 219-246. For François’s collecting of casts, see Elam, Caroline. 1993. “Art in the Service of Liberty: Battista Della Palla, Art Agent for Francis I”. *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*. 5: 33-109.

Olson writes, “Poussin culled representations of antiquities from authoritative compendia, imbedding them within readable historical fictions. The placement of the already known object in a shared conceptual field registered an affiliation between the artist in Rome and a community in France with common interests.” However, Vouet’s work departs from historical fictionalization and aims instead to suggest an antique reference without the emphatic positioning of Poussin’s works. In other words, what is at stake is the way that artists position their work in relation to the past. For Poussin, the past is Rome, and while his work reinforces the idea that France is the inheritor of the antique past, he is simultaneously problematizing this relationship. And these interests were very much references in the shifting bodies of power, those of the noblesse de robe and the noblesse d’épée, which in 1645, when Anne’s grotesques were commissioned, were on the verge of civil conflict. In a deeply politicized environment, antiquity took on volatile symbolic capacities. Olson also suggests the ways that antique symbols were interpreted differently between “Roman antiquarian circles” and Parisian Frondeurs, noting Poussin was quite aware of the ways that his representation of antique themes could be applied to current events in France.<sup>370</sup> Vouet uses the Roman motif of the grotesque but situates it within the context of the French interior. Whereas Poussin created a nexus of associations through his display practices in the Grande Galerie, or through his subject matter in his panel paintings, his work is very much about France’s relation to the antique past. How one interpreted these works delineated one’s views on the ancient/modern controversy. But Olson sees Poussin’s use of panel painting to relate political messages as something quite novel, especially when compared to Caron’s *Massacre of the Triumvirs*, which he describes as “anomalous”, writing that while it

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<sup>370</sup> Olson, 111.

“serves as a measure of the long collaboration of antiquarianism and politics in France, the relative rarity of an easel painting accomplishing such a task suggests that in the sixteenth century, broadly speaking, France had not yet invented for itself a culture that brought those practices to painting.”<sup>371</sup> Hence, Poussin destabilized the imaging of power through his use of two-dimensional panel painting. Vouet on the other hand, used antiquity merely as a reference, i.e. the grotesque motif, and while his interior schemes were painted in novel ways, they do not attempt to challenge the status quo. Rather, the medium of decorative wall painting reinforces the hierarchy. This type of ornament physically situated on the walls of a royal structure emphasized the siting of monarchical authority. Antiquity in Vouet’s schemes is not contested, it is only used to legitimize royal claims. While panel painting was in fact a relatively new vehicle for political ideology, decorative schemes were not. Through defining royal authority decoratively, that ornament denotes a specific place or siting of royal prerogative. In a political culture such as that in France, the centralized nature of this authority could be symbolically portrayed through a situational context rather than other media.

## **6.5 Grotesque Materiality and the Siting of Royal Authority**

Dewald notes that in France, one cannot find the same idyllic vision of noble country life as one does in England, where virtue can be found through rusticity. Instead, for the nobility of France, the country house was increasingly viewed as the base for “vice, ignorance, conceit,

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

failure, and personal decrepitude.”<sup>372</sup> In both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, vast fortunes were spent on country houses, but despite this, “no country ideology seems to have ensued.”<sup>373</sup> In short, Dewald concludes that members of the nobility “had to make their way within the public sphere.”<sup>374</sup> However, Elizabeth Hyde has pointed out the increased production of garden and agricultural manuals in the seventeenth century.<sup>375</sup> Considering the broad scale of building on country estates, the interest in botanical specimens and the recurring motif of nature in the literature of the period, Dewald’s thesis appears tenuous. Nonetheless, he is correct in identifying an accelerated emphasis on the building of urban residences. For Paris, this meant more constructions and renovations of hôtels that in turn then needed to be decorated with the current fashions. Decorative painting of interiors was not the only symbolic form of social status; elaborate ornamented portals became a common feature of urban façades. This revitalization was well underway even during the reign of Henri IV, in an effort to centralize and unify the nation after the devastation of the religious civil wars.<sup>376</sup>

The decoration of the rooms of hôtels and urban palaces were exceedingly expensive. Schnapper cites a few sums for important “grands décors”: in the early eighteenth century Antoine Coypel was paid 60,000 livres for his decoration of a vault at the Palais Royal and between 1658 and 1660, Errard was paid 78, 000 livres for his work on decoration for the

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<sup>372</sup> Dewald, 20-21.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid. This will have further ramifications for the situation in Toulouse, as I detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>375</sup> Hyde, Elizabeth. *Cultivated Power: Flowers, Culture, and Politics in the Reign of Louis XIV*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. p. 124-125.

<sup>376</sup> Ballon, Hilary. *The Paris of Henri IV: Architecture and Urbanism*. New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1991.

Louvre.<sup>377</sup> These projects for “grands decors” typically were defined by covering wall spaces with panels for frescoes, typically without major figures, hence being entirely decorative or without real narrative. Prices for such projects would generally range from a few thousand livres for something simple such as a faux wood or marble treatment to the grand expenditures that one finds at the Louvre. In short, painted decoration was a luxury of no small cost. A patron had to have a strong reason and desire for such an undertaking. Grotesque paintings, as at the Palais Royal for Anne of Austria would have been on the higher end of the price spectrum, for not only were they painted in rich colors with gold backgrounds, but were created by Vouet, who was the preeminent painter of interiors during this period in France. With regard to grotesque ornament, while there are no records specifically for painted examples, the inventory of Cardinal Richelieu’s possessions in the Palais Royal made after he died offers an interesting point. Amidst a remarkable collection of gems, objects from China and Turkey, and numerous tapestries and paintings (some of which were done by Vouet) appears one mention of grotesques. Found on a tapestry from Brussels, the item is described as consisting of

grotesques et paysages au milieu des grandes pieces et le plus à fondz de soye rouge cramoisy or et argent contenant dix pieces ayant de cours quarante trois aulnes ou environ sur trois aulnes et un quart ou environ de haulteur toute doublée de toile et picquée de soye à lozanges, prisee après avoir icelle tenture veue piece après piece

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<sup>377</sup> Schnapper, Antoine. *Le métier de peintre au grand siècle*. [Paris]: Gallimard, 2004. p. 220. According to the essay “Money and Exchange Rates in 1632” by Francis Turner, see [1632.org/1632Slush/1632money.rtf](http://1632.org/1632Slush/1632money.rtf) (accessed 8/24/11), 1 livre= 1 guilder, and 1 guilder = \$36 today. That would mean that the cost of Errard’s work at the Louvre would be roughly \$2,808,000. For comparison, a single cabinet picture during this period by one of the most important painters would have fetched generally no more than 3000-5000 livres, and standard prices hovered in the tens or hundreds of livres, not thousands. For instance, Aubin Vouet, Simon’s brother, sold a large painting to a religious order in Toulouse, and received 800 livres each for a series of “grands tableaux”. See Schnapper, p. 195-220. For Aubin Vouet, and the Pénitents noirs, see p. 203.

and its cost was estimated at 32,000 livres.<sup>378</sup> This tapestry is amongst the most expensive items in the inventory, and is notable for also being the only item that specifically mentions the use of the grotesque motif. While the use of grotesque imagery certainly was changing, it appears that in the first half of the seventeenth century, it appeared on the most expensive of objects and was situated within the most labor-intensive spaces. Its use was not incidental. Artists furthermore would have been especially interested in expanding their repertoire of grotesque motifs precisely because they could dictate higher prices. Grotesque ornament became a symbol of sovereignty, and in turn, the spaces in which it is used denoted spaces of power. Well before Louis XIV ascended the throne, it is possible to see the way that fashion was used to display power but also to stabilize images of royal authority.

Plate Seven (Fig. 66) directly represents Anne's power as regent. Vouet's overall format for this panel is slightly different and clearly was made to draw the viewer's attention to this area of the room that contained its most essential message. The panel is wider than the others, and has a greater array of floral regalia. Along a held aloft above an eagle, one of her devises reads NATOS ET NOSTRA TUEMER—'We guard our children'. Tuemur can also have the connotation of 'support' 'guide' or 'protect'. Below this eagle, two eaglets metamorphose into a cartouche that bears an image of Minerva surrounded by weapons that she is prepared to take up. In the central cartouche, now oval, a crown tops a monogram that carries an A for Anne and an L for Louis, overlapping, and surrounded by what appear to be lilies. This flower has a particular

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<sup>378</sup> Société de l'histoire de l'art français (France). *L'Art à l'époque du cardinal de Richelieu*. Paris: Société de l'histoire de l'art français, 1985. See item, 604, p. 43.

reference, for not only does it call to mind the fleur-de-lys, but to Louis IX's defining of the tripartite form as representing faith, wisdom and chivalry.<sup>379</sup> The lowest register again finds a frieze like rectangle with an assortment of undefined figures that move towards an altar. Though its specific origin or meaning is indecipherable, the aspect of sacrifice reads clearly, and the dogs at each side of this cartouche summarize Anne's fidelity to the crown and to her son.



*Fig. 66 Dorigny after Vouet, Plate Seven*

With this image, Anne is staking her claim to her authority as regent, and she situates it within the intimate space of the royal bath suite. These were furthermore stock images for the regents of France. Nicola Courtright has discussed what she defines as the “physical and decorative mirroring” of ornamental programs between monarchs and their queens during this

<sup>379</sup> Louis IX also serves also as an ancestor for the Bourbon family.

period.<sup>380</sup> Drawing from a position developed by Fanny Cosandey<sup>381</sup> which asserts that female regents actually had more power precisely because they could not rule, Courtright surmises that the symmetry in imagery for both monarch and regent was a result of the “value the king’s consort may have embodied, even if she was not actively involved in affairs of state: the importance of her *position* as queen if not her person or personality.”<sup>382</sup> Courtright goes on to further elaborate not only the mirroring between Bourbon monarchs and their queens, but also the ways that regents borrowed images from one another. Minerva was one such image borrowed: after Henri IV’s death, Dupré was commissioned to make a medal with Marie depicted as Minerva holding an olive branch, with Louis XIII now depicted as a young Apollo. In her other hand Marie holds the lightning bolts of Apollo. Courtright believes that “the paradoxical notion that readiness for war is a necessary component to achieving peace had been consistently developed for queens in post-Henrician imagery.”<sup>383</sup> Furthermore, Anne of Austria used the image of Minerva in her Cabinet des Bains at the Louvre, painted by Eustache le Sueur, and by doing so put forward her image within this tradition of widows prepared to sacrifice for their sons and the nation. Le Sueur painted a Mercury figure and Muses to complement his depiction of Minerva, and this suggested that Anne as Minerva, did not represent a martial quality but rather the wisdom brought by perpetual peace.<sup>384</sup> However, the regent’s position was delicate, and these de facto rulers had to convey the sense that they would also “remain capable

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<sup>380</sup> Courtright, Nicola. “A New Place for Queens in Early Modern France” in Fantoni, Marcello, Georges Gorse, and Robert Malcolm Smuts. *The Politics of Space European Courts Ca. 1500-1750*. Roma: Bulzoni, 2009. p. 269.

<sup>381</sup> Cosandey, Fanny. *La reine de France: symbole et pouvoir: XVe - XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000.

<sup>382</sup> Courtright, p. 270.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, p. 282.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid. See also See Mérot, Alain. *Eustache le Sueur*, Paris, 1987, 306-307, 311-312, n. 175-176.



of carrying forward their husbands' or sons' —the states' —martial campaigns.”<sup>385</sup> The use of flowers and vegetal motifs further underscores Anne's rhetoric. Like the grotesques of the sixteenth century, harnessed by monarchs to assert power through the visual means of ornament, Anne seized the current fashion for flowers as “ornaments of the earth”, and utilized floral imagery to convey the sense of her cultivation of the king and nation.<sup>386</sup>

Grotesques were useful in this practice of siting the place of royal power, especially for the Bourbon regimes. In the seventeenth century, beginning with the urban building projects in Paris under Henri IV, Bourbon authority was established through physical and visual means in the city, demonstrating its role as capital within the realm. Henri's court did not imitate that of the Valois, through demonstrating allegiance to provincial bonds by way of the constant movement of an itinerant court. While Henri certainly conveyed a number of privileges to provincial centers, he nonetheless used Paris as a base for his re-establishment of royal authority in the wake of the Wars of Religion. This practice of siting the court so specifically would only increase through the rest of the century culminating in Louis XIV's sequestration of the court at Versailles.

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<sup>385</sup> Courtright, 283.

<sup>386</sup> Hyde, Elizabeth. *Cultivated Power: Flowers, Culture, and Politics in the Reign of Louis XIV*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. p. 120. Hyde is quoting Antoine Furetière (1619-1688) whose *Dictionnaire universel* defined the persuasive ornament of rhetorical practice through analogy with flowers.

## 6.6 Fashionable Grotesques and the currency of *ornement*

Increasingly in the seventeenth century, it was wildly fashionable to maintain a home that incorporated rich decorative schemes. But fashion was not a game in the capitol; it could insure political success. By presenting a painting cycle that used the most fashionable painter, developing work in the most fashionable mode, acquired at a price unknown but certainly astronomical, Anne cemented her place at the top of the social hierarchy. Grotesques connoted a luxury form of consumption, and they were infused with images of botanical specimens, demonstrating a shift not only in the motif from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, but the grotesque's conflation with the newly stylish representation of flowers and plants.

Christopher Bondy has argued that Vouet's art was ambiguous "due to its *location* in the space of 'decoration', as opposed to the emerging connoisseurial space of cabinet pictures. Vouet's art was also ambiguous in its *visual qualities*, refusing to subordinate its sensual power to the intellectual pretensions of art's emerging liberal status."<sup>387</sup> While Vouet produced a number of altarpieces, especially in Italy, and some panel pictures, his output in France is largely definable through its decorative qualities while simultaneously the modern conception of painting on panel was reaching a foundational nadir. This signals that there was a great demand for rich interior environments in France, especially in Paris, and artists had a large clientele of wealthy, aspiring households for whom to create lavish schemes.

Vouet worked for the Queen Regent, the Chancellor, and many members of the Parisian elite. While he was certainly one of the most important painters of the early seventeenth century,

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<sup>387</sup> Bondy, Christophe, and Simon Vouet. *Simon Vouet, between Tableau and Ornement*. London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2007. p.11.

Vouet was not atypical in that his workshop produced a variety of projects. Falling more into the mode of the typical Renaissance artist, his workshop produced projects that fit many demands, and different media. Vouet has often been maligned in comparison to Poussin, who devoted his output almost solely to panel painting. And this new emphasis on panel painting would come to dominate the art of the Academy in the second half of the seventeenth century. This is then the chief narrative of art historical research for the seventeenth century in France, in which the hierarchy of genres and the heroic mode of narrative panel painting came to provide the epitome of French artistic output under Louis XIV. While panel paintings and the work of the Academy did in fact dominate many aspects of artistic production during the century, there were also other competing voices and aesthetics within the visual culture. Vouet provides one of these alternatives, with his strict emphasis on decorative schemes, and as Crelly has shown, in innate flexibility and his artistic output.<sup>388</sup> Much of his work appears in the 1640s, just at the moment of transition in the demand for certain kinds of pictures.

Nonetheless, one of the elements that distinguish grotesques in France is that they continued to be elaborated over the course of the seventeenth century, staying well within the canon of established taste. While the borrowing of grotesque motifs was anachronistic, their use from antiquity signaled an anachronism from the get-go. However, in the seventeenth century there is a noticeable lack of three-dimensional grotesques. The motif relatively disappears from stone and wood productions, and is limited mostly to two-dimensional media, in particular as decorative wall painting, tapestry borders and prints.

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<sup>388</sup> Crelly, 110.

Moreover, grotesques were a regular feature in decorative schemes in other non-royal houses throughout Paris and further afield. These include rooms in the Chateau de Cheverny, the Hôtel Lambert, the apartments in L'Arsenal, and Villacerf. Like the rooms decorated for Anne of Austria, all of these sites were known for their abundant use of a variety of materials, colors and textures, but almost all were almost completely two dimensional decorations and did not have the emergent three dimensional qualities of spaces such as the Galerie François Ier. They were all completed as well by artists who had served in Vouet's workshop, and this aspect of his continuing influence will be examined below.

In *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise, dédié au Roy* of 1694 'grotesque' is defined as "Il se dit des figures imaginées par le caprice du Peintre, dont une partie représente quelque chose de naturel, & l'autre chose de chimérique."<sup>389</sup> And likewise, Henri Sauval described the grotesques of the Queen's Cabinet des Bains with similar emphasis, "petit mais fort enjoué, de toute part ce ne sont que fleurs, ornements, chiffres, paysages couchés sur fond d'or et entassés les uns sur les autres avec beaucoup d'art et de caprice."<sup>390</sup> This element of capriciousness will be explored below, but one can see from both descriptions that the limits of the grotesque were changing. The 1694 definition points out especially the grotesque featured prominently in two-dimensional design, and that the role of the 'Peintre' was what generated the figure as a whole. In order for something to be a grotesque, it necessitated "caprice" in the service of a "Peintre" and both descriptions suggest a combinatory representation of fantasy and nature. In other words, it is not so much that grotesques disappear in the seventeenth century as some scholars have

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<sup>389</sup> Académie française. *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise, dédié au roy*. Paris: J.B. Coignard, 1694. p. 545.

<sup>390</sup> Sauval, Henri. *Histoire et recherches des antiquités de la ville de Paris*. Paris: Chés C. Moette, 1724. Vol. I, 168.

suggested<sup>391</sup> but rather that new definitions are being generated for them. This artful caprice, a quality most prized at court, was embodied in the two-dimensional image. The grotesque motif gave rise to a genre of painting that was powerful precisely because of its whimsical, fantastic, and ephemeral qualities. The motif became synonymous with a fashionable kind of painting.

This fashionability was aided by the introduction of flowers into the painting of the motif. Grotesques in interior decorations were no longer limited to generic representations of garlands and festoons, but often took on more pointed depictions of specific kinds of botanical specimens. Elizabeth Hyde has studied the increasing use of floral imagery in seventeenth century decoration.<sup>392</sup> She notes the varieties of flowers as well as the compositions in which they are embedded, resulting in elaborate schemes of representation. These flowers were newly interspersed with elements of grotesque decoration, as in the case of the Hôtel de Sully (built 1625-1630), which she cites as an example of the new modes of ornamentation. She describes how “roughly hewn beams, floral bouquets, decorative cartouches, and landscapes were rendered with charming simplicity.”<sup>393</sup> The Hôtel de l’Arsenal provides a further example of the floral motif, here clearly situated within a grotesque motif. Like the paintings for Anne of Austria at the Palais Royal, these grotesques were set against a gold background, and painted on panels situated between gilded Ionic pilasters. The flowers in the images are brightly colored and represent a range of recognizable flora. These in turn surround cartouches with the initials, M M joined, to represent the name of Marie de la Meilleraie, the second wife of the hôtel’s builder, the Maréchal- Duc de la Meilleraie. The ceiling was painted with bands of flowers entwined

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<sup>391</sup> See for instance: Barasch, Frances K. *The Grotesque; A Study in Meanings*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971.

<sup>392</sup> Hyde, 110-114.

<sup>393</sup> Hyde, 110.

with ribbons. A frieze of female figures spans the room, and a central female figure on the ceiling is believed to represent France. Crelly suggests that this decorative scheme was meant to symbolize the glories of the Meilleraie as well as their interconnectedness to the glory of France.<sup>394</sup> The use of flowers in the midst of the grotesque reinforces the idea of fertility and abundance personified through the female figure of France. Moreover, the use of flowers conveys the sense of cultivation, which had many different meanings during this period, but here could refer to the cultivation of female virtue.<sup>395</sup> For Anne of Austria, not only was the use of flowers in her grotesque program a nod to fashion, but she could also use this imagery to convey her abilities to cultivate the fitness of the boy-king, as well as to sustain the flower of France herself.

Dewald notes the differentiation being made in France about its political system as opposed to those of England and Holland. He writes that youth and ambition were sifted out to point to essential features of a monarchy. The French, he writes, “saw their own society as dominated by the court and its values, hence as society of intense competition and equally intense uncertainties – hence also as a society equally suited to the young.”<sup>396</sup> Drawing from the memoirs of Saint-Evremond and later for the eighteenth century, Montesquieu, Dewald sees a continuation of the idea that France’s society had essentially broken with the past, that the constant refashioning of social mores necessitated a “violation of tradition” that was firmly centered on “court life, and the power of change extended to gestures, language, and modes of

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<sup>394</sup> Crelly, 110.

<sup>395</sup> Hyde, 89-90, for aspects of cultivation of the individual as represented through floral imagery.

<sup>396</sup> Dewald, 25.

thought.”<sup>397</sup> I do not agree that French culture during the period sought a break with the past, but there is evidence that fashion was becoming more important and more rigidly codified. Moreover, society was perceived as changing faster. The visual evidence of grotesque imagery suggests that the situation was complex. Within the confines of the urban interior, matters of color, materials, and subjects took on a vital importance. Vouet created grotesques that defied the forms of the sixteenth century, creating a new formal vocabulary, and hence a new fashion, while simultaneously using the form in general to provoke notions of lineage, status, and wealth. Schalk and Dewald are both correct—there is pedigree coexisting with personal ambition. Dewald recognizes that these forces are concurrent when he writes that a member of the nobility “could reconcile personal ambition with respect for dynastic traditions.”<sup>398</sup> The motif of grotesques became one of the primary symbols of seventeenth century art that conveyed this duality.

Starting as early as the fifteenth century, so notes Krzysztof Pomian, a discernible shift occurs in European society: greater travel across the continent, and hence further exchange of goods that were previously unavailable.<sup>399</sup> This exchange is evidenced across the arts and in the various principalities of Europe. By the seventeenth century, a greater thrust towards observation and an interest in natural history arose. This is a very modern occurrence. And yet, so far this study has argued that Vouet’s grotesques for Anne of Austria were old-fashioned or anachronistic. Certainly in their commission, this is so, but as Bernard Palissy showed at the end of the sixteenth century, the grotesque form could represent a space for a recording of

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid, 25. This is a development that will be further examined in the Chapter on Watteau.

<sup>398</sup> Dewald, 28.

<sup>399</sup> Pomian, Krzysztof. *Collectors and curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500-1800*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990. p. 36.

observations of natural phenomena. Though Vouet is often considered something of a standard bearer of puff-piece sentimentality, his grotesques for Anne of Austria present a grappling with the newly fashionable modes of natural observation. This also places him squarely within concurrent debates over genius, imagination and invention.

Not only was the term ‘grotesque’ being redefined in the seventeenth century, but other terms such as *ornement* and magnificence were as well.<sup>400</sup> Art during the period had a symbiotic relationship with other arts, particularly poetry, and while this was not exactly a new occurrence (there are similar parallels in the previous century) it is perhaps the way that these relationships are expressed that is novel. Fumaroli argues that there was a continuing cultural bias in favor of poetry, architecture, and music, while the visual arts were relegated to a lower rank due to their mechanical status.<sup>401</sup> Art theory, while explicitly developed in Italy during the late fifteenth and sixteenth century, was still in its infancy in France, and attempts to define the terms and practices of art was unique to this era. Only one year after the publication of Dorigny’s prints, the Academie was founded for instance, and this entailed a certain regimentation of ideas. Beauty, for instance, “naît d’une triple entente, entre la richesse de la matière, l’habileté de la façon et la proximité à la nature, et sur un plan, la variété des matières et des motifs, l’intensité de leurs couleurs, la concurrence des techniques.”<sup>402</sup> Coquery points out the role of variety in the conception of decorative projects, and suggests that this may have been influenced by the influx of goods from France’s newly globalized systems of trade. He writes, “Cette beauté vient

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<sup>400</sup> Mabile, 54-55.

<sup>401</sup> Fumaroli, p. 17, n. 38.

<sup>402</sup> Coquery, Emmanuel, “L’esthétique et le statut des arts du décor en France dans la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle” in *Un temps d’exubérance*. Coquery is synthesizing the quote from sources including Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, Chapelain, and Georges de Scudery, all of whom were writing in the 1650s, after the production of the Cabinet des Bains grotesques, and yet are responding to currents well under way in the 1640s, and certainly propelled by the popularity and influence of Vouet’s workshop.



d’ailleurs, de l’Orient – le gout des laques du Japon et des porcelains de la Chine naît alors en France – ou temps des antiques, et l’imaginaire s’exalte quand les deux se mêlent: le luxe par excellence, c’est celui des Mèdes ou des Perses.”<sup>403</sup> He points out the ‘intermingling’ of the two sources, the Asiatic with the Antique that would have come to fruition through the mercantilist economy developed under Henri IV and rapidly expanded under Richelieu.<sup>404</sup>

Weyl depicts the *honnête homme* as deferential to absolutist monarchs on account of the centralized nature of government in France. This is in contrast to the Italian courtier who had the ability to move from court to court. These French courtiers had as their duty “a mission to please others in order to win respect. This was achieved in an impersonal, polite, gallant and docile manner, without any manifestations of individual excess.”<sup>405</sup> Weyl further notes the abundance of conduct manuals that appear at the turn of the century, in order to regulate behavior in a post civil war context. He also points out that many of these manuals were written by and for the bourgeoisie, which suggests the ways that the corridors of power were newly opened under Henri IV, and which would lead to the proliferation of members of the noblesse de robe.<sup>406</sup>

Patterns of collecting and texts devoted to developing universal compendia of objects or phenomena not surprisingly appear at this time.<sup>407</sup> What sets France apart in this respect is its centralized government that meant that this new knowledge of the world was essentially filtered through the court, and set up a hierarchical chain of appropriation. The artists working at the

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>404</sup> See Coquery, 57 and Richard Bonney. *Political Change in France Under Richelieu and Mazarin, 1624-1661*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

<sup>405</sup> Weyl, 18.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>407</sup> One may look no further the collecting habits of men such as Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc in Provence, or the collection of engravings in Bernard Picart’s *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*. Picart incidentally also engraved views of the interiors of the Hôtel Lambert, complete with grotesques in the wall decorations.

Louvre sat atop this chain, and their efforts would influence much of what would come to be called the “grand gout”. Coquery writes, “La fondation des ateliers du Louvre,..., inaugure une politique royale du décor.”<sup>408</sup> Nonetheless, artists were still very much seen as artisans.<sup>409</sup> When it came to artistic production, the early seventeenth century saw the first real examination in France of concepts such as genius, imagination, and invention. Weyl has suggested that genius was considered an indispensable aspect of artistic creation, but as yet was still a nebulous quality, ill defined. Invention was likewise a confused term, and was akin to something more like talent or skill, if as Weyl suggests it was considered “a quality that could be acquired through learning” in some schools of thought, while others considered it “something one had or not.”<sup>410</sup> Imagination on the other hand, came to be seen as something undesirable, as it was seen increasingly through the century by the likes of Pascal and Fontenelle as “something not governed by rules, uncontrolled, e.g. not within the boundaries of reason. For de Piles especially, he placed imagination in his chapter “Les Idées imparfaites de la peinture.”<sup>411</sup>

Vouet was tasked with navigating this changing terrain. His work came to be so desirable precisely because it reflected the needs of the time. His decorative schemes could convey the aspirational needs of a bourgeois client, could give them a set of images that drew from the past to convey the idea of a lineage, while at the same time, use spatial configurations that were entirely contemporary. His work played with the visual means of interior decoration, exploiting color and form, for bourgeois and queen alike, in a way that distilled an ornate pictorial scheme

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<sup>408</sup> Coquery, 58.

<sup>409</sup> Schnapper, Antoine. *Le métier de peintre au grand siècle*. Bibliothèque des histoires. Paris: Gallimard, 2004. p. 116.

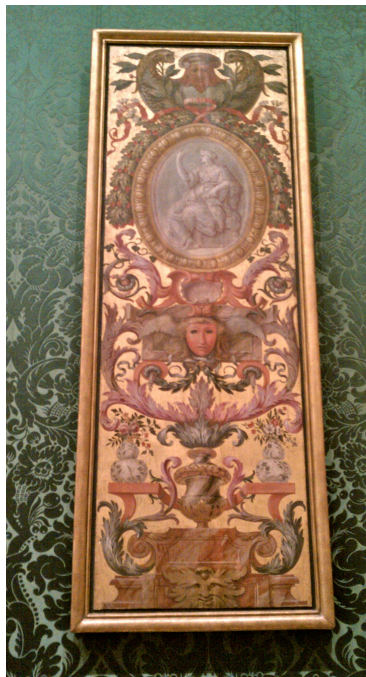
<sup>410</sup> 51-57.

<sup>411</sup> Weyl, 55.

into lighthearted romp. Vouet, having grown up around the court, but never fully part of it, had antenna for the desires of each player within this system. His work is anachronistic for its ingredients: grotesques and their metamorphosing bodies, their cartouches and their references to royal authority. His work is novel, however, for the inventive reinterpretation that he gave these images.

## 7 Epilogue: Artifice and Antiquarianism

In 1695, Louis XIV (1638-1715) purchased the chateau of Meudon for the Grand Dauphin (1661-1711), his son and heir apparent. The chateau became a site for important artistic endeavors at the turn of the century, where Jean Berain created a series of grotesque ornaments that were copied and widely disseminated through prints. The appetite for grotesque ornament had not diminished over the course of Louis's reign, and Berain's designs only underscore the continuing taste for the motif. Charles Le Brun too had dabbled in the style, and the rich depiction using gold and vibrant colour continued to play a major role in the grotesque's use in interior spaces. Panels currently housed in the Getty Museum, and attributed to Charles Le Brun highlight the ornate character of panels painted with the motif, and suggest the influence that Vouet's work continued to play. (Fig. 67)



*Fig. 67 Attributed to Charles Le Brun, Grotesque panel, late seventeenth century*

With the advent of the eighteenth century, as before, grotesques continued to be used in elite contexts. Grotesque ornament was prominent across media, but it also encountered two different major trajectories. The first was its use under the rubric ‘arabesque’, a continuation of the Fontainebleau style that introduced a broad range of exotic new elements to its vocabulary. This mode also lent itself to the airy stylings of rococo interiors and objects. The second trajectory occurred later in the century, at a time roughly contemporaneous with the excavations of the ruins at Pompeii and Herculaneum that gave grotesque ornament a new regimented set of elements. This renewal of interest in classical literalism resulted in a category usually relegated to the term “Neoclassical”. Again, interiors and objects incorporated a steady use of grotesque imagery, but to very different aesthetic effects from the first half of the century. I will conclude this study by briefly outlining these developments and defining how grotesque ornament might be traced more thoroughly in a future study of eighteenth century art.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the term grotesque was changing. The idea of the grotesque as a subaltern figure had become increasingly prominent in its usage. The ornamental grotesque came to be seen synonymously with ‘arabesques’, which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been two discrete, but related categories of ornament. In the sixteenth century, arabesque was most often used to denote ornament comprised almost solely of vegetal forms, artfully contrived. This motif could be activated within a grotesque composition, or it could stand on its own as a highly decorative embellishment. It could also refer to things deriving from Arabic culture. A 1555 entry in the *Tresor de Evonime* regards arabesque as “proper aux arabes”.<sup>412</sup> This designation of being relative to Arab culture continued

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<sup>412</sup> <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=1353661125;>

to inform the meaning of the term arabesque. The style of ornament relative to this meaning was developed out of its similarity to the line quality of Arabic calligraphy. Highly stylized vegetal motifs evoked this kind of imagery and hence took on the term arabesque. Corneille writes in his *Toison d'Or* of 1661 “avec divers grands feuillages a l'Arabesque” clearly alluding to the foliate style of ornament rooted in sixteenth century meaning.<sup>413</sup> These two meanings of arabesque coalesced into a quality of sensuousness that would later be exploited by nineteenth adventurers and artists who sought to depict the Arab world as intoxicating, exotic, and uniquely different from French culture.

In the eighteenth century arabesque however, took over many of the semantic functions of grotesque. The 1788 *Encyclopédie méthodique* includes a long entry on the arabesque in which the word is discussed in terms very similar to grotesque ornament. The encyclopedia's authors at one point write that arabesques “peuvent donc être appelés les rêves de la Peinture.” The whole entry is quite floral itself, and clearly draws from the developments in ornament dominant at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The authors ask “Le Peintre d'arabesques a-t-il le projet s'éloigner de la Nature pour enrichir & caractériser ses compositions?” to which they then answer:

Il rappelle aussi-tot à son souvenir les ingénieuses métamorphoses chantées par les Poètes, il reproduit leurs Syrenes, leurs Sphinx, leurs Dryades, les Faunes, les Génies & ces enfans célestes, qui voltigeant, caressent ou blessent les mortels au gré de leurs caprices.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Corneille, Pirre. *Œuvres de P. Corneille: Pertharite. Œdipe. La Toison d'or. Sertorius*. Chez la veuve Gandouin, 1759. p. 282.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=tsgtAAAAMAAJ&dq=corneille+toison+d'or+arabesque&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](http://books.google.com/books?id=tsgtAAAAMAAJ&dq=corneille+toison+d'or+arabesque&source=gbs_navlinks_s)

<sup>414</sup> *Encyclopédie méthodique. Beaux-arts*. Paris: Panckoucke, 1788. Accessed via gallica.fr. See <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40964281m>

Invoking many of the same references of the grotesque's authors in the sixteenth century (and antiquity) the arabesque had clearly taken over many of the mytho-poetic functions of grotesque ornament. The passage in the *Encyclopédie* is a rolling monologue on the rhetorical properties of a motif once classed as mute, spiraling tendrils and leafy notes, now endowed with a cacophony of mythological sirens. The paintings of Antoine Watteau, though very much grotesques, were coined Arabesques in his lifetime, and it is his production of the motif that is largely responsible for shifting the meaning of the terms.

The French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) was a major practitioner of grotesque decoration in the early eighteenth century. Celebrated most often for his development of a wholly new genre, the *fête galante*, Watteau's ornaments are often overlooked. Nonetheless, his training in the workshop of the decorative painter Claude Audran III (1658-1734) was to have a supremely important impact on the development of Watteau's mature style. Moreover, the overall formal features of the *fête galante* absorb and distill aspects of the grotesque motif more completely than any painting previously. Watteau's adoption of the grotesque motif allowed him access into the elite demi-monde evoked in his later works.

A catalogue published in 1753 detailing the contents of the painter Charles Antoine Coypel (1694-1752) provides a rare instance in which Watteau's work is described as employing grotesques. An item lists a fan by Watteau "contenant quelques figures grotesques, dans un Cartouche d'ornemens" and another similar image in a print.<sup>415</sup> However, prints of Watteau's work published in the seventeenth century were generally termed arabesques. Scholars of

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<sup>415</sup> *Catalogue des tableaux, desseins, marbres, bronzes, modèles, estampes et planches gravées: ainsi que des bijoux, porcelaines, et autres curiosités de prix, du cabinet de feu M. Coypel*. Paris: [s.n.], 1753. p. 56, item 260.

Watteau's work continue to use this designation. Doing so however, de-historicizes these images from their sixteenth and seventeenth antecedents, as well as the awareness in Watteau's own lifetime that they were intimately connected with the imagery developed at the School of Fontainebleau. But arabesque does highlight the eighteenth century fascination with exotica. Given that Watteau aimed to insert novel elements into his grotesques such as monkeys and chinserie, his grotesques encapsulate an increasingly global vision, perhaps more accurately reflected in the term arabesque. But the term arabesque was also extended to images that only a century before had been coined grotesque. A 1778 sale catalogue lists amongst the items of a man recently deceased, "Neuf différentes Etudes & Sujets, par Vouët, dont deux arabesques a la pierre noire."<sup>416</sup> Even though Vouët's work was compiled and sold in the seventeenth century as grotesques, by the end of the eighteenth century these images were referred to as arabesques. But they are one and the same: ornaments that fit into the tradition of image-making formulated in the sixteenth century.

Watteau saw himself as a Fleming, and during the early years of his sojourn in Paris was "on the fringes" of the Fleming colony of artists in the city, represented through their participation in the Foire St. Germain.<sup>417</sup> This is attested by Watteau's expertise in the copying of Gerrit Dou, for example.<sup>418</sup> Other scholars of the artist's work have noted the emblematic quality

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<sup>416</sup> *Catalogue de tableaux, dessins, estampes d'un beau choix, quelques bronzes, marbres... après le décès de M\*\*\** Vente 25 févr. 1778... Paris: Poupet : Piauger, 1778. p. 12.

<sup>417</sup> Crow, Thomas E. *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. p. 48.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid. See also Caylus's decription of Watteau's activity at this time, especially in relation to Dou's work, "La vie d'Antoine Watteau, Peintre des figures et de paysages, Sujets gallants et modernes" lue à l'Académie le 3 février 1748 in Rosenberg, Pierre. *Vies anciennes de Watteau*. Paris: Hermann, 1984. p. 58.



that could largely be inspired by the use of Flemish models.<sup>419</sup> Many of the images draw from the rich symbolism of European folk culture, both in the ornamental works as well as the panel paintings. Moreover, as routinely noted in regards to Watteau's work, the primacy of Italian comedic tropes provides us with a contemporaneous source for the iconography that was part of his subjects. Crow notes the impact of the withdrawal of royal support for the Comédie italienne, with many of its acrobats and theatrical members relocated to the fairs, such as that of the Foire St. Germain. In turn, elite members of society increasingly drew from this lowly level of entertainment to fill the void left by the cessation of lighter theatricals at Versailles. These popular fairs infected elite culture, and the imagery demanded by this segment of society furthermore incorporated folkloric elements.

On the *fête galante*, Crow writes

The genre is a frankly artificial one: it had to be if it was to add another, necessary layer of fiction over the life-as-fiction it portrays, that is, if it was to be in any way distinguishable as a mode of representation from the already existing lower genres. Its emergence can be traced via Watteau's own passage through the milieu of fair entertainment and a series of marginal, often highly unrealistic – or anti-realistic – forms of artistic practice.<sup>420</sup>

This can be seen in his artistic training through copying, imitating, and combining/substituting of various pre-conceived images. Watteau effectively reduced any semblance of the natural in his works. His artistic training too had more in common with the pastiche of sixteenth century practice than with the academic preparation of artists in the eighteenth century. This was learned

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<sup>419</sup> Seerveld, Calvin. "Telltale Statues in Watteau's Painting" in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Vol. 14, no. 2 (Winter, 1980-1981) p. 151-180.

<sup>420</sup> Crow, 57.

perhaps also from Claude Gillot (1673-1722) for whom Watteau worked from 1704-1705. Gillot normally created figural compositions based on stock images, rather than developing wholly new elements. He was also actively involved with Italian theatrical troupes.<sup>421</sup>

After working with Gillot, Watteau moved to the studio of Claude Audran (1658-1734) a major decorative painter in France at the early century. Audran routinely made use of grotesque imagery, which he often left partially unfinished in order to let his clients insert their own tastes into the overall composition. The primacy of the decorated interior retained its importance to artistic patronage, and with his inclusion in Audran's milieu, Watteau was able to encounter an elite clientele that had as yet eluded him. Not only did working on interior decorative schemes gain Watteau an entrance into the great houses of France, but his association with the Audran family also gave him an introduction to the Académie Royale. Through participation in the production of elite modes of decoration, Watteau, like artists before him, was able to ascend to the highest ranks in France. Moreover, his ornamental endeavors aligned him with the tradition of grotesque ornament derived from Fontainebleau. Signalling a continuum of the motif across two centuries, Caylus writes that Audran "avait étudié principalement les ornemens, tels qu'ils avaient été employés par Raphaël au Vatican et par ses élèves en divers endroits, comme aussi par le Primatice à Fontainebleau."<sup>422</sup> In short, Caylus recognized that the art developed at Fontainebleau in the sixteenth century was derived from the work of Raphael, and hence ultimately from grotesque decoration. He does not parse out a particular aspect of the work produced at Fontainebleau, rather the term signifies a specific style. In turn, this style was readily absorbed into the work of Watteau.

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<sup>421</sup> Crow, 58.

<sup>422</sup> Caylus in Rosenberg, *op cit.* p. 60.

Though Watteau's *fête galante* are indebted to the lowly worlds of the actors and acrobats, his ornament clearly was made in an attempt to align himself with elite levels of consumption. Posner points out that during these years in Watteau's career, "ornamental design remained one of his major artistic activities, and possibly the most lucrative for him."<sup>423</sup> For Watteau, ornament was an entry into the demimonde. And while some scholars suggest that Watteau's ornamental output was limited to the early part of his career, Posner asserts that the artist continued to refine the motif in his work through the duration of his short life.<sup>424</sup> Grotesque ornament in France historically connoted elite modes of consumption; by employing the motif, Watteau situated himself within the parameters of aristocratic reception of his work.

Katie Scott discusses the uses of grotesque ornament at alternate sites outside of Versailles that proffer an elite challenge to the central authorities.<sup>425</sup> Watteau was one of a group of artists creating works for this lesser nobility. She then switches to using the term arabesque when writing about Watteau's only two surviving examples of painted grotesques from the Hôtel Nointel on account of their "formal elegance".<sup>426</sup> (Fig. 68 and 69) Breaking from Posner's position, she asserts that Watteau's audience for decorative schemes were made up of the lesser nobility. She surmises that "his failure to break into the patronage system of elite society perhaps accounts for Watteau's early abandonment of decorative work in favour of easel painting."<sup>427</sup> Though the Nointel images are early in Watteau's short career, the dates of his successive decorative works cannot be ascertained. Reproduced in engravings ordered largely by Jean de

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<sup>423</sup> Posner, Donald. *Antoine Watteau*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984. p. 59.

<sup>424</sup> Posner, 61. For other opinions, see especially...

<sup>425</sup> Scott, Katie. *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. p. 133-136.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

Jullienne (1686- 1766), Watteau's grotesques offer only an elusive glimpse into what would have been a major aspect of his artistic production. The range of approaches to grotesque imagery in these prints suggests that he would have been returning to this motif throughout his career. Scott does indicate however that of the grotesque works bound for known patrons, that these individuals represented the highest-ranking patrons of Watteau's clientele.<sup>428</sup>



Fig. 68 Jean Antoine Watteau, *L'Enjoleur*, 1708

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, p. 291, note 36.



*Fig. 69 Jean Antoine Watteau, Bacchus, 1708*

Scott recognizes the rhetorical power of the interior decorated scheme. In France, where the boundaries between aristocratic and bourgeois circles were becoming more contentious, the power of siting one's rank through the development of ambitious modes of display became key to promoting one's social aspirations. She writes "decoration, and particularly grotesque decoration, articulated noble prestige in a manner quite different from the collecting of works of art, which, though it might also distinguish the owner, focused attention more nearly on things,

on the objects of an essentially bourgeois accumulation.”<sup>429</sup> Michael Moriarty also discusses the difference in patterns of consumption amongst the classes in France.<sup>430</sup>

Watteau’s only surviving painted grotesque panels currently reside in the Musée des Beaux Arts at Valenciennes. (Fig. 68 and 69) Originally they were part of a decorative scheme Watteau painted for the Marquis de Nointel that included eight panels set in a small dining room at the Paris residence of the marquis, the hôtel de Nointel. Cailleaux points out that the marquisate of Nointel was a recent title purchased by the first marquis, Louis de Bechameil (1630-1703) and that the newly ennobled (and enriched) family would have desired to spend lavishly on such a small room to cement their social position in Parisian society.<sup>431</sup> The two surviving panels *L’Enjoleur* and *Bacchus* were joined in the dining room by paintings representing *Le Buveur*, *La Folie*, *La Faune*, *Momus*, *Le Vendangeur*, and *Le Frileux*, and they were all subsequently reproduced in prints. Each image consists of a central figural group set within a leafy fantasy folly suspended on delicate tendrils and surrounded by birds and flowers. They are quiet vignettes of bucolic and pastoral life, and provide an insight into Watteau’s early source material. They show a strong resemblance to Claude Audran’s *Months*, produced at roughly the same time, and Watteau completed the Nointel cycle while still in Audran’s employ.<sup>432</sup> Cailleaux proposed that the panels were arranged one above the other and that the platforms on which the figural groups are arranged are angled to emphasize viewing from above or below. *L’Enjoleur* for instance has a platform angled as if we are looking down on it, while

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<sup>429</sup> Scott, 123.

<sup>430</sup> Moriarty, Michael. *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>431</sup> Cailleaux, Jean. 1961. "Decorations by Antoine Watteau for the Hôtel De Nointel". *The Burlington Magazine*. 103, no. 696: i-v.

<sup>432</sup> Forti Grazzini, Nello, Francesca Zardini, and Claude Audran. *Divinità, scimmie e segni zodiacali: i dodici mesi grotteschi su bande da Claude III Audran*. Milano: Moshe Tabibnia, 2007.

the *Bacchus* stands on a stage that is tilted up, and hence gives the viewer the impression of looking up to see the god in his vernal setting. Posner points out that the simplicity of these panels and their “naturalistic components” set them apart from the work of Audran, and indeed, these panels display the same feathery wisps of leaves and indefinite spaces that he would use repeatedly in his later paintings.<sup>433</sup>

In *L'Enjoleur*, the male figure (the cajoler) turns as if to guide the female figure away, carrying a staff that evokes a shepherd. The woman's dress moves gently in the air, and she turns from the viewer, and we lose sight of her expression. It is not clear, as in almost all of Watteau's work, whether the female is giving in or rebuffing male advances. Beneath the couple, dangling from the dais on which they stand is a bagpipe, a routine symbol of male sexuality culled from popular culture. A basket of fully bloomed flowers is suspended above the couple, and is a common motif throughout the series of eight. Watteau's use of color is precise; set against a white background his figures and many of the tendrils are vivid shades of red, pink, green or blue, decorously applied. The *Bacchus* stands on a platform artfully angled upwards from the viewer, and standing in a relaxed contrapposto, we identify the figure by his animal skin cloak, the thyrsis in his hand, and the goat that stands in attendance at his feet. Rather than the hint of a secluded wood in *L'Enjoleur*, Watteau has installed this *Bacchus* in a bower, a social space within the garden, intimating the festivities to take place under the god's watchful eyes. This is also one of Watteau's first instances exploring the impact of using statuary in an image, a motif

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<sup>433</sup> Posner, 61.

that would recur throughout his painting, and one that he would use to weave together the complex evocations of lust and leisure in garden settings.<sup>434</sup>

The randy couplings of sixteenth century grotesques hence still resonated in the elements of the motif created in the early eighteenth century. Watteau's panels for Nointel furthermore played with the eye, suggesting fictive architectures, and in turn dissolved the form of the wall on which they hung. Though these panels do not have the emphatic physical presence of grotesques developed in stucco at Fontainebleau, they do shape the space of the room. The reliance on elements from nature and the continued references to satyrs and garden spaces were still active components of the grotesque motif. Caylus's connection between Audran and Fontainebleau further underscores that a distinctively French aesthetic had long been operating, one built off of the grotesques originally found in the Domus Aurea two and a half centuries earlier. Though Watteau plied many different sources for his imagery, both high and low, grotesques were so pervasive in the French visual culture, their absorption and definition in his work explains much of his methods. By all accounts, he painted in a pastiche fashion, using rote elements that he developed through drafting. He reworked his canvases to include his stock figures in ambiguous groupings and complex fantasy spaces. He also made many images that were distinctly grotesque, such as his *La Grotte* (Fig. 70) in which a fictive grotto is suspended on shells and leafy tendrils, and where the excrescences of the cave again recall the grotesque's original reference.

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<sup>434</sup> Seerveld, Calvin. Telltale Statues in Watteau's Painting. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. 14 (Winter 1980-81) p. 151-80.





Fig. 70. Jean-Antoine Watteau, *La Grotte*, engraved by Gabriel Huquier, 1729

*La Grotte*, like all of Watteau's drawings and paintings was engraved for the collector Jean de Jullienne.<sup>435</sup> Jullienne then had the collection of engravings printed in his four volume *Recueil*.<sup>436</sup> Interestingly, much like engravers working at Fontainebleau in the sixteenth century, printmakers of Watteau's works often made their images not from final products, but working drawings. Hence, in *La Grotte*, engraved in 1729 by Gabriel Huquier, the lines of the grotto have an expressive, floating quality that underlies the general state of fantasy of the scene. As is

<sup>435</sup> Vogtherr, Christoph Martin, Jennifer Tonkovich, and Andreas Henning. *Jean De Jullienne: Collector & Connoisseur*. London: Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 2011.

<sup>436</sup> Dacier, Emile, Albert Vuaflart, and Jacques Hérold. *Jean de Jullienne et les graveurs de Watteau au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Pour les membres de la Société [etc.], 1921.

apparent in a number of Watteau's images, the painter often reversed tonality in the picture, where he brought darker areas in the image to the foreground and left the background to recede into lightness. He routinely used the shadows of his foregrounds then to characterize the tension or dramatic quality of his figural groups. In his lush painting *La Surprise* for instance, three figures are ensconced in a dark corner of a garden, and the sky behind them recedes into a pale tapestry of pinks and blues that are subtly repeated in the figures clothing and flesh. (Fig. 71)

The male figures both seem to be variations on the Scaramouche type, while one plays a stringed instrument and looking on, while the other feverishly embraces a nearly limp female figure. Both of these male figures do not seem entirely grounded, their dainty feet just barely touch the ground. The swooping arc of the couple's embrace is stylish but wholly artificial. Scaramouche is much like a satyr type, randy, mockish, and the sexual energy of the piece is part of its central theme.



*Fig. 71 Jean Antoine Watteau, La Surprise, oil on canvas*

The artful play of light and dark, the comedic, sexualized characters, and the destabilized qualities of space and figures are surely derived from Watteau's development of the ornamental motif. But it is clear that much like Vouet before him, there is experimentation and response to the visual culture of the artist's context. For Vouet, the colours and compositions between his

ornamental works and his panel paintings seemed to reinforce one another, but Watteau took this further and made the grotesque qualities of his paintings so prominent, he effectively dissolved the boundaries between the two modes of representation. In *L'Enjoleur*, Watteau created a small tableau of lust set within a grotesque frame, whereas in *La Surprise*, he situates a similar tableau of sexual frivolity within the productive mode of grotesque imagery. In other words, his *fêtes galantes* no longer need the grotesque frame, their elements are comprised of the productive methods of grotesque image-making.

Watteau's decorative works were highly influential in the eighteenth century, especially through their reproduction in a number of print series. But there were other practitioners of ornament making in France, and they carried on a tradition that could be traced back to Berain, and further back to the sixteenth century. However, in the increasingly competitive consumer culture of early modern France, the grotesque motif took on further variations. Hence, we have the development of grotesques in Oudry's exceedingly floral tapestries of the later half of the century, or Meissonnier's development of the auricular style of ornament, clearly derived from grotesques but further stylized to appear more shell-like, and derived from nature.<sup>437</sup> The structural logic of paintings by Boucher and Fragonard further display the visual play, the ambiguous spatial relationships, the artificial depiction of nature and the lusty subject matter of Watteau's works. Future research could trace the aesthetic theory behind these developments and endeavor to uncover how aware artists were of their borrowing from sixteenth century models.

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<sup>437</sup> There were many practitioners of ornamental painting in France throughout the eighteenth century. For Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) see Opperman, Hal N., and Jean-Baptiste Oudry. *J.-B. Oudry, 1686-1755: [Exhibition Catalog]*. Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1983. Meissonnier, Juste Aurèle, and Dorothea Nyberg. *Oeuvre de Juste Aurèle Meissonnier. Introd. by Dorothea Nyberg*. New York: B. Blom, 1969. For other artists working with grotesque imagery, see Faniel, Stéphane. *Le Dix-huitième siècle français*. Paris: Hachette, 1957 as well as Kjellberg, Pierre. *Le mobilier français du XVIIIe siècle: dictionnaire des ébénistes et des menuisiers*. Paris: Editions de l'Amateur, 2002.

Such a study could further explore how artistic tradition was created, or how market demands stimulated the desire for the ornamental motif.

Though grotesque imagery found an audience through the rest of the eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth, there were vocal critics of the style. And yet, what artists beholden to the new classicism produced, was simply a more literal version of grotesque imagery that went back to its ancient roots. On the one hand, there was a backlash against the hyper artificiality of Watteau's work and that of his successors. *In his Pensées detaches sur la peinture* (1776-1781) Diderot considered the artifice of works popular at the time:

Talent imitates nature, taste guides choice; nevertheless, I like rusticity better than affectation, and would give ten Watteaus for one Teniers. I prefer Virgil to Fontenelle, and like Theocritus better than both; though he may lack the elegance of the first, he is truer, and free from the affectation of the other.<sup>438</sup>

Diderot conflates rusticity with authenticity, while simultaneously dismissing the formal elegance of Watteau's style of painting. Grotesque ornament had been produced for two and a half centuries for its sophisticated artifice and its ability to convey both artist's and patron's imagination. For the Enlightenment audience however, the discovery of Pompeii (1748) and Herculaneum (1708) offered alternative sites to the grotesque's Domus Aurea, and a chance to reconsider the ancients and their relationship to both art and nature. The explorations of the ancient sites around Mt. Vesuvius provided a new corpus of ruins to challenge the reception of

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<sup>438</sup> Quoted in Eitner, Lorenz. *Neoclassicism and Romanticism, 1750-1850: Sources and Documents*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970. p. 66.

antique works. Bellicard and Cochin dismissed many of Herculaneum's paintings for being too provincial. Upon viewing frescoes depicting architecture, they write:

Generally speaking, the pillars are double or triple the length of the natural dimensions: the profil of the mouldings of the cornishes, chapiters, and bases, is of a wretched Gothic taste; and most of the Arabic mixture in the architecture, is as ridiculous as any of the Chinese designs.<sup>439</sup>

Bellicard and Cochin's description of the ancient frescoes at Herculaneum promulgated a reconsideration of architectural and interior spaces. The liberties in building which they define through the Arabic, Gothic and Chinese allusions, would be stripped away in much design of the period. Eighteenth century furniture, interiors and ornament took on a more regularized, symmetrical, and simple aspect more in line with notions of ancient virtues. They effectively censored the fantastic qualities of Roman architecture and painting and instead offered a vision of Rome not so dissimilar from Vitruvius.<sup>440</sup> Later they write about the depictions of landscape and ornament, and their preference for things approximating nature is clear.

Nevertheless, we must except two or three pieces which are agreeably coloured, though not true, and in which the landskip is touched with ease: we may allow the

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<sup>439</sup> Excerpt taken from the 1753 English edition of *Observations on the Antiquities of the Town of Herculaneum* reprinted in Harrison, Charles, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger. *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. p. 448.

<sup>440</sup> The literature on Neoclassicism is vast. See especially Boime, Albert. *Art in an Age of Revolution, 1750-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Dubin, Nina L., and Hubert Robert. *Futures & Ruins: Eighteenth-Century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2010. And for an excellent study of the uses and abuses of history, albeit in England, see Coltman, Viccy. *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

same advantage to some other pieces of ornament twined with vine leaves or ivy. In general, what they have taken from nature, is good: but, we cannot say so much for their works of imagination.<sup>441</sup>

The disdain that the authors show for imagination of the ancients was reinforced by other publications that would ultimately provide templates for artists creating decorative schemes. One such example was *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte* published in Naples in 1757, but circulating through Europe in the late eighteenth century. In Figure 72 from *Le antichità*, the change is clear: though the proportions of the architecture presented are not realistic, gone are the swooping and sensuous lines developed as part of the grotesque aesthetic. Though figures are clearly metamorphosing bodies, and the architecture presents a stage-like set, there is no formal innovation in this image. They are more descriptive, and this corresponds with the late eighteenth century phenomenon of observation. But whereas observation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had yielded an array of artistic possibilities, eighteenth century observation aimed for a new sobriety. Texts aimed to convey authenticity. The appropriation of this new dogmatic grotesque form would hit its peak under the regime of Napoleon I, for whom Charles Percier and Pierre Francois Leonard Fontaine would develop a heavy Empire style, often culling imagery from texts such as *Le antichità*.

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<sup>441</sup> Harrison, Wood and Gaiger, 448.

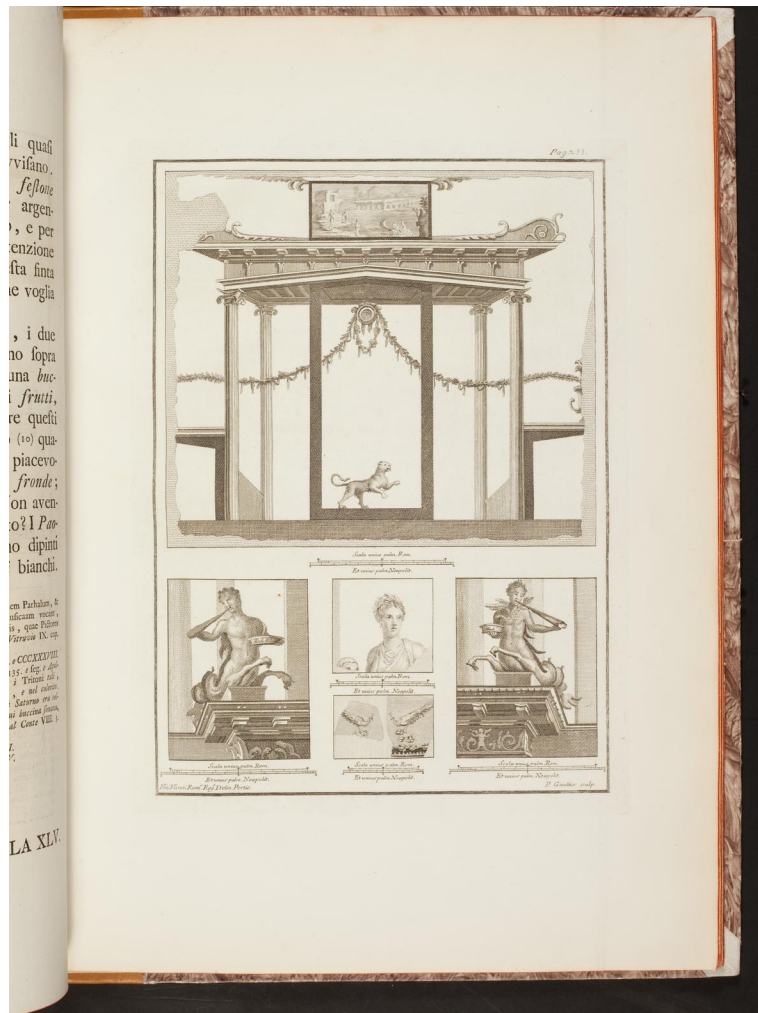


Fig. 72 Image from *Le antichità di Ercolano esposte*, Naples, 1757

The works of Percier and Fontaine, the writing of Diderot, Bellicard and Cochin present one trajectory, one in which the view of antiquity underwent a purification. Though this view had many adherents in intellectual and artistic circles, production on the ground was more complex. Grotesque imagery was used in a variety of forms, and it retained its essential aristocratic reference point. A growing bourgeoisie desired to have interiors decorated with the motif but the cost was prohibitive for many. Jean-Baptiste Réveillon developed wall-paper, and



many of his samples depicted grotesque imagery (see Fig. 73). These papers were often hand painted and colorful, and could be industrially produced in a cost-effective way that allowed them to be readily purchased by non-aristocratic consumers. These wallpapers were only one example of the vast array of products that used grotesque motifs during the eighteenth century, produced and bought by a bourgeois audience. The grotesque still carried an aspirational quality and was still much associated with fashionable taste. Its adoption into one's home continued to convey the siting of social position. But with the increased industrialization of products bound for a consumer culture, grotesque objects and images were now available to a much broader audience.



*Fig. 73. J. B. Réveillon, Paris, 1785, Wallpaper, 181 x 61 cm*

But the expense involved in grotesque decoration was still a powerful method to convey one's status amongst the elite as well. In 1775, Louis XVI's brother, the Comte d'Artois commissioned Hubert Robert to paint a series of his Italianate landscapes for the interiors of the small chateau of Bagatelle. But alongside these, the Comte also ordered grotesque ornament to be made. Ornamental painters responsible for these included Dusseaux, Félix and Pion.<sup>442</sup> Clearly within the neoclassical canon of taste, the grotesque motif still had a powerful function. At Bagatelle, Baillio writes, "many of the Neoclassical motifs adorning the walls of the pavilion in the form of painted or stucco "grotesques," illustrated the temptations of erotic love and sensual gratification to which the hedonistic young prince was by this time thoroughly addicted."<sup>443</sup> The entire complex was built as a pleasure ground and the small chateaux seems to have been designed to maximize connection between visual phenomena as well as heightened sensorial experiences. In doing so, the overall plan created visual connections between the interior decoration and the exterior ornamental gardens. Drawing from the *Livre des comptes de Bagatelle*, Baillio describes this connection with the chamber des bains:

The ceiling was decorated with a blue sky, and on the paneling of the door leading to the salon was depicted a female bather upheld by water nymphs, whose lower anatomies twisted into extravagant arabesque shapes terminating in urns and cameos. The recess of the window looking out onto the formal garden, the doorframes, the cornices, and the borders of the ceiling were edged with delicate painted friezes of striped ribbons and flowers.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Baillio, Joseph. 1992. "Hubert Robert's Decorations for the Cha<sup>^</sup>teau De Bagatelle". *Metropolitan Museum Journal*. 27: 149-182. p. 155.

<sup>443</sup> Baillio, 154.

<sup>444</sup> Baillio, 156.

What Baillio is describing is not just an exercise in orchestrating media together in the interior space, but seems to suggest that this space was articulated much as a grotesque. The inventory includes metamorphosing female bodies in view, vistas into garden spaces, and borders of leaves and ribbons, and cognitively the mind could conflate these images into a moment in which the grotesque motif is a thought process rather than simply an image. Increasingly over the course of the late sixteenth and through the seventeenth centuries, garden spaces had become a notable transition between rooms decorated with grotesques and the exterior natural world. This suggests that at Bagatelle, the relationship between the grotesque motif, its source in the grotto and its relationship to the landscape of ruins is further emphasized through the late eighteenth century cult of nature, and the desire for full sensorial experience of place. Simultaneously with the development of the grotesque motif through all its iterations, the spaces between interior and ornamental garden exterior were brought closer together. The parterres of Versailles for example, used the bounding form of the arabesque, a literal transference from the ornamental surface to the ornamental space of the garden. At Bagatelle, interior and exterior coalesced into a cohesive vision; it was not an element transferred from one surface to another, but rather a transformation of space and the experience of that space. The chambre des bains and its relationship to the garden together created the grotesque motif through its visual connections. Hubert Robert had recently been appointed designer of the royal gardens, and it is no coincidence that the grandeur of vision encapsulated in his painting of the landscape of ruins could accommodate the sensorial merging of interior and exterior. Francois Joseph Belanger's cross-sections of Bagatelle convey the sense of the combination made to achieve this effect. The salon in cross section includes grotesque panels situated around an empty space where Robert's paintings would have been

fitted and windows rhythmically placed to combine panel, painting, and garden into one cohesive vision. Dubin points out that Robert had a “vast” art collection that included works by Watteau, Pater, Fragonard, and Boucher.<sup>445</sup> This would suggest that Robert had a sensitivity to the workings of the grotesque image, and at Bagatelle, was siting authority through the use of the motif not simply by having it created along the walls but by carving space into grotesque form.

In conclusion, with this study I have aimed to show how and why the grotesque motif was used over the course of two and a half centuries in France and how the motif’s use there was different from elsewhere. In France, the motif became foundational to the development of a uniquely French art that emphasized the elaboration of interior spaces in order to convey social rank and authority. In order to develop such schemes, artists had to be adept at using a variety of materials and were required to have a special knowledge of the effects of space on viewing practices. By its modular form comprised of a set of easily used elements, grotesques could be manipulated into two and three dimensional formats, and the individual pieces within the schemes changed in order to emphasize identity, place, or even artistic experimentation. Through its very physical presence, grotesques could also convey the sense of prowess, virility or even sexual adventure. And lastly, though its initial adoption in France allowed for the appropriation of ancient imagery, the grotesque motif also came to reference French authority itself, through the visual referencing of Fontainebleau and the court. This hegemony in the realm of decorative design would allow France to achieve dominance in the production and exportation of luxury goods throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As its colonial empire expanded, the

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<sup>445</sup> Dubin, p. 103, n. 52.

nation's overseas and European identity could be summarized through the refinement of the goods and printed images that emanated from its cultural centers. Grotesque decoration was an important element in this construction of a visual culture, and underscores the centrality of ornament to the development of France's luxury industries.

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